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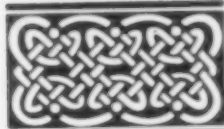
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ABSTRACT

The Early Years Project investigated early childhood education programs for kindergarten-age children in the Canadian provinces of New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario, and Alberta. This study combined quantitative and qualitative data to: (1) document changes in kindergarten and child care and their impact since 1990; (2) investigate how kindergarten and child care could combine to meet children's and families' needs; (3) compare and contrast kindergarten and child care services; and (4) obtain views of parents, teachers, child care staff, and key informants on current early childhood education and prospects for the future. Data were collected by means of surveys, personal interviews, focus groups, and program observations. From the findings, profiles were developed describing recent changes and the current environment for kindergarten and child care in each province. The findings indicated that most parents supported an integrated early childhood program providing a combination of full-day, year-round care and education through the school system, with teachers and child care staff less enthusiastic. The majority of kindergarten and child care programs observed received acceptable to very good scores with regard to program quality, with the presence of trained staff being the most important predictor of quality. Parents, child care staff, and teachers agreed that social features and language activities were the most important aspects of early childhood education and agreed that kindergarten was appropriately more academic than child care. Preliminary calculations indicated that program integration was no more expensive than the current split provision. Based on findings, recommendations were devised for policy at the national level and for responsibilities at the local and provincial levels. (KB)

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Early Childhood Services for Kindergarten-age Children in Four Canadian Provinces: Scope, Nature and Models for the Future

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**Early Childhood Services
for Kindergarten-age Children
in Four Canadian Provinces:
Scope, Nature and Models for the Future**

*A research project sponsored by the Caledon Institute of Social Policy
with financial support from the Child Care Visions Program
Human Resources Development Canada*

by

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and
Julie Mathien

September 1998

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Executive Summary

The Early Years Project is an investigation of early childhood education programs for kindergarten-age children in four Canadian provinces. Supported by Human Resources Development Canada and sponsored by the Caledon Institute of Social Policy, it is the first study of its kind to investigate how kindergarten and child care combine to meet the needs of children and families in communities in four provinces. It is the first study to describe recent changes in early childhood policies and programs, and to explore possibilities for future action. It is also the only early childhood education research in Canada that combines qualitative and quantitative data as well as the results of program observations to describe and analyze current situations, the impact of the changes and prospects for the future.

The Early Years Project was organized around four goals:

- to document the changes and their impact in communities in the four provinces that have made changes to both kindergarten and child care since 1990
- to investigate how kindergarten and child care combine to meet the needs of children and families
- to document similarities and differences in kindergarten and child care
- to obtain the views of parents, teachers, child care staff and key informants on current early childhood education and prospects for the future.

Research took place in communities in New Brunswick, Québec, Ontario and Alberta. Because the provinces are very different from one another in the way that they implement early childhood education, they provided the project with a ready-made laboratory for examining contemporary early childhood education issues.

Despite similarities in content and approach throughout the country, kindergarten and child care are provided concurrently under different government departments through a variety of funding programs. Kindergarten is supported by taxes and is fully in the public sector. Child care has characteristics of both the public and private sectors. While parents pay the lion's share of child care costs out of private resources, expansion in regulated child care centres depends on public funding. The line between public and private is particularly blurred for kindergarteners, many of whom attend both types of programs.

In addition, teachers and child care staff have different qualifications and work under different conditions. Wages and benefits vary substantially. The programs themselves are likely to differ in terms of class size and staff-child ratios. The constant, of course, is the children since thousands move between child care and kindergarten on a daily basis.

This split service provision is unplanned; early childhood services just grew this way over time. Public kindergartens have existed in Canada since the 1880s and, for many generations, were a child's first educational experience. Child care retained its status as a private, charitable service for poor children until the early 1970s, with a brief foray into public provision during World War II. However, programs are divided more in name than in function: Kindergarten, termed educational, serves a child care function; high-quality, regulated child care is also recognized as early childhood education.

The Early Years Project observed kindergarten and child care programs to assess quality, document similarities and differences, and examine whether the preferences expressed for goals and content are present in the programs themselves. The research documented the impact of change and tested possibilities for reform. The project found areas of consensus and dissonance among parents, teachers, child care staff and key informants regarding general program goals and content, views on current programs and implications of the proposed new program models.

The project findings are described in five sections:

- profiles that describe recent changes and the current environment for kindergarten and child care in the four study provinces
- views of parents obtained from surveys and focus groups
- views of teachers and child care staff obtained from surveys and individual interviews
- the results of program observations
- opinions of government representatives and community leaders obtained from key informant interviews.

Method

Provinces in the study were selected on the basis that they had made changes in child care and kindergarten since 1990. The researchers chose communities with English- and French-speaking as well as urban and rural populations. The findings in the study are based on information gathered via:

- surveys of 275 parents and 122 practitioners
- face-to-face interviews with practitioners: 20 kindergarten teachers and 19 child care staff
- focus groups with parents (45 participants)
- program observations in 21 kindergartens and 19 child care programs
- key informant interviews (28) with policy-makers from four levels of government and representatives from the early childhood education community.

All methods were administered in English and French.

Key findings and policy implications

new program model

The Early Years Project findings support the implementation of a new model for early childhood education in Canada. In the proposed model, parents could choose to have their child attend a half school day, a full school day or an extended day. The programs would be staffed by trained teachers and early childhood educators. Three-quarters of the parents in the study and more than two-thirds of the teachers and child care staff were of the opinion that children are ready for a full-day school program before age 6.

Parents went further; three-quarters supported an integrated program which would provide a combination of full-day, year-round care and education programs through the school system for children of kindergarten age. No parents valued the current split provision.

Teachers and child care staff were a good deal less enthusiastic about the proposed integrated model. However, several factors increased the appeal of the model for all three groups:

- The program would be located in schools.
- It would be introduced gradually via demonstration sites that would be refined with input from parents and staff.
- The program would link with the school curriculum in later grades.
- It would be more cost-effective than the current split programs.
- There would be a fee based on income for time outside regular school hours and during the summer.

In addition, parents were more favourable towards the program if:

- The part of the day covering normal school hours would be supported by taxes and have no fee.
- The program meant more government funding than is currently the case because it would serve more children.
- All 4- and 5-year-olds could attend.

quality in early childhood education

Preferences and attitudes are not the only foundation on which to build policy and program decisions. In early childhood education, program quality enters the picture. Overall, a majority of both kindergarten (70 percent) and child care programs (61 percent) in the study received acceptable to very good scores in the program observations. Jurisdiction made a difference in that kindergarten quality was more dependable across the country. Child care scores in two provinces gave rise to concern. Coordination between kindergarten and child care was associated with higher-quality programs.

The presence of trained staff was the most important predictor of quality in both child care and kindergarten. Parents were firm in their conviction that trained staff are necessary. Furthermore, even in provinces where both teachers and child care staff have formal qualifications, parents did not support replacing kindergarten teachers with college-trained early childhood educators, although they agreed that the two types of practitioners could work as a team with teachers in a supervisory role.

Practitioner anxiety about new program models will only be heightened if concerns about training and qualifications are ignored. Strategies for resolving this historic tension include crossover training and improved career paths for child care staff.

On a public policy level, the Early Years Project findings indicate that steps are needed, likely through provincial legislation and regulation, to ensure that at least some of the staff in children's programs have age-appropriate pre-service and in-service education and training. The situation is more serious in child care than in kindergarten. Programs within a universal system like education have a greater public presence than those that take place within child care, which in Canada, unlike many European countries, is not a system but more a part of what could be termed a 'services market.' Kindergarten's public presence, combined with almost universal acceptance and use, carries with it a broader public consensus regarding expectations in areas such as program quality. This consensus encourages authorities, whether local or provincial, to introduce measures like teacher certification that result in program similarity province-to-province, even though there is no federal government presence in elementary education.

what is most important in early childhood education?

Parents, child care staff and teachers were asked to rate the importance of 20 different program elements. All three groups agreed that social features (e.g., cooperating and sharing with other children) and language activities (e.g., understanding and using language) were the most important aspects of early childhood education. Learning to read and write were ranked either 19th or 20th out of 20 program elements by all three groups.

Nevertheless, the three groups agreed that kindergarten is slightly more academic than child care and that this focus is appropriate. The groups also agreed that the two programs were most similar where social features were concerned.

cost-effectiveness

Preliminary calculations indicated that program integration in early childhood education is no more expensive than split provision and may, in fact, cost less per child. Although further work is required, the Early Years Project data show that the combined average costs for a child in Québec who attends both child care and full-day kindergarten were less than those for children in Ontario and Alberta who attend half-day kindergarten and child care. Work completed in Ontario in 1993 showed that an integrated program for 4- and 5-year-olds with staff-child ratios of 1:12 generated savings of \$1.12 per child per day.

Recommendations

1. The federal government should take leadership in establishing a federal/provincial partnership to fund, implement and evaluate demonstration school-based integrated early childhood education programs for kindergarten-age children. New Brunswick, because of its recent experience implementing kindergarten, and Québec, due to its innovative early childhood reform, can provide special provincial expertise.
2. Local and provincial jurisdictions should be responsible for curriculum and programs should continue to respect child development and the wishes of parents and practitioners regarding the content of early childhood education programs.
3. Regardless of new models, provincial and local jurisdictions with responsibility for education and child care should take steps to encourage communication and coordination between kindergarten and child care programs, especially those that share children.
4. Provincial and local jurisdictions should recognize that early childhood education programs require a minimum number of trained staff to ensure quality and take steps to make the necessary regulatory and funding changes.
5. The jurisdictions should cooperate in providing 'crossover' in-service training in early childhood education at levels appropriate to both teachers and child care staff.

Introduction

The Early Years Project travelled to four provinces and talked to parents, teachers, child care staff, government and community key informants. We sought their views on early childhood education in both child care centres and kindergartens, their opinions on possible new models and their thoughts on how the programs combine to serve children and families. In addition, we looked at both types of programs to investigate similarities and differences in content and goals.

Research took place in communities in New Brunswick, Québec, Ontario and Alberta (the provinces that have made changes in both child care and kindergarten since 1990). In addition to providing a context for change, the provinces were very different from each other in the way they deliver early childhood education. They provided the project with a ready-made laboratory for examining contemporary early childhood education issues.

Despite similarities in content and approach throughout Canada, kindergarten and child care are offered concurrently under different government departments and through various funding programs. Kindergarten is supported by taxes and is public sector. Child care has characteristics of both the public and private sectors. While parents pay the lion's share of national child care costs out of private resources, expansion in regulated child care centres is very much dependent on public funding. The line between public and private is particularly blurred for kindergarteners, who may attend both types of programs each day.

In addition, kindergarten teachers and child care staff differ in their qualifications and conditions of employment. Wages and benefits vary a great deal. The programs themselves are likely to differ in terms of class size and staff-child ratios. The constant is the children, since thousands move between child care and kindergarten on a daily basis.

This split service provision is unplanned; early childhood services just grew this way over time. Public kindergartens have existed in Canada since the 1880s and, for many generations, they were a child's first educational experience. Child care retained its status as a private, charitable service for poor children until the early 1970s, with a brief foray into public provision during World War II. However, programs are divided more in name than in function: Kindergarten, termed 'educational,' serves a child care function; high-quality, regulated child care also is recognized as early childhood education.

The Early Years Project found areas of consensus and dissonance between and among parents, teachers, child care staff and key informants with respect to program goals and content, satisfaction with current programs and implications of proposed new program models. We observed kindergarten and child care programs in order to assess quality, document similarities and differences, and test whether the preferences expressed for goals and content by parents and practitioners were present in the programs themselves. The research documents the impact of change and tests possibilities for reform.

The project findings are described in five sections:

- profiles that describe recent changes in and the current environment for kindergarten and child care in the four study provinces
- views of parents obtained from surveys and focus groups
- views of teachers and child care staff obtained from surveys and individual interviews
- a look into programs via the results of program observations
- opinions of government representatives and community leaders obtained from key informant interviews.

The last section discusses future models for early childhood education and the environment for progress in this area.

Although exploratory, the Early Years Project is the first study of its kind to investigate how kindergarten and child care meet the needs of children and families in communities in four provinces. It is the first study to describe recent changes and test possibilities for future action. It is also the only early childhood education research on this topic that combines qualitative and quantitative data as well as the results of program observations to describe and analyze changes, current situations and prospects for the future.

Provincial Profiles: Chronicles of Change

The study design called for an investigation of early childhood education within a context of change. The study communities drawn from these four provinces provide an important landscape of change, with provincial variations. Two provinces, New Brunswick and Québec, expanded programs. Although New Brunswick lost child care spaces, creating kindergartens resulted in a major increase in quality early childhood education. Ontario and Alberta took steps that resulted in reduced funding, service or both.

New Brunswick

Both child care and kindergarten experienced change in New Brunswick between 1990 and 1997. The province conducted a major child care review in 1994. Government began to state clearly that child care subsidies were intended primarily to ease low-income parents' way into the workforce. Funding was changed: Per-child grants were eliminated and the resulting savings were put into increasing child care subsidy daily rates and raising the income limit for eligibility. However, the gap between the maximum fee and the maximum subsidy has widened with the result that even parents who qualify for full subsidy pay a top-up that can be as high as \$60 a month.

The most substantive change took place in schools. In 1992, New Brunswick introduced publicly-funded full-day kindergarten for 5-year-olds. In 1996, school boards were eliminated (education is now funded and regulated by the province and delivered by local school districts). Elected parent committees advise the district staff. By the fall of 1998, the province will have lowered the statutory school age from 6 to 5, making its kindergartens the only compulsory pre-primary program in the country. Parents may continue to choose private schools. A total of 6,500 children attended kindergarten in 1996-97, some of whom also were enrolled in child care. The kindergartens have a clearly-articulated 'play-based' or 'activity-based' orientation.

Until 1992, approximately 60 percent of 5-year-olds attended private, fee-supported kindergartens, usually for a half day, although some of the kindergartens were embedded in full-day child care programs. Private kindergartens were operated by a wide variety of personnel, among them certificated teachers who had left the public system, often for family-related reasons. New Brunswick does not have a regulation requiring that child care staff be trained in early childhood education.

In addition to the obvious space and equipment challenges of establishing a new level in an existing system, New Brunswick quickly needed to create a cohort of well-trained and educated kindergarten teachers. With the agreement of the New Brunswick Teachers' Association, the province adopted a strategy that combined innovation, equity for the private kindergarten workforce and careful use of resources.

The Faculty of Education at the University of New Brunswick established a part-time degree program for kindergarten teachers. Those hired from private kindergartens who did not have degrees or needed to upgrade were given eight years to do so, during which time they earn a discounted salary. When fully qualified, they will be placed on the negotiated salary grid with at least eight years seniority. Those who previously taught in the school system before moving to a private kindergarten can add those years of service to their seniority. While the government has a looming salary expense balloon, it had some relief during the initial period of capital and equipment expenditure.

Québec

Québec's licensed child care programs, in general, concentrate on preschoolers. Since the mid-1980s, school boards have operated fee-supported, school-based child care programs for children attending elementary school, including kindergarteners. Up until the fall of 1997, children attended kindergarten for a half day and, if they needed child care, spent the rest of the day in one of the school board programs that are not covered by provincial licensing regulations and legislation. Kindergartens enrol 91,000 5-year-olds; 15,500 4-year-olds attend inner-city preschools; and 30,000 kindergarteners attend child care during nonschool hours.

In 1997, Québec announced a series of reforms unprecedented in North America in the areas of family support and early childhood education. The stated goals of the reforms were to assure equity with a family allowance plus extra support for low-income families, make work/family balance easier to achieve, enhance child development and equalize opportunity. The government combined the funds from a variety of grants to families to provide a family allowance with the amount based on

need (up to an income level of \$59,000 for a two-parent family), better-paid and longer parental leave provisions (on hold pending an agreement with the federal government), full-day, publicly-funded kindergarten for 5-year-olds, a continuation of the existing inner-city preschools, and expanded and more affordable child care.

Local early childhood centres will create 73,000 preschool child care spaces for infants to 4-year-olds by the year 2001. In 1997, the maximum fee for 4-year-olds was \$5 a day. This affordability measure will be expanded to both 5-year-olds who attend school-based child care and to younger age groups over the next few years. School boards will assure the availability of school-based out-of-school programs through each school's parent/community committee.

Ontario

The only province with widespread junior kindergarten for 4-year-olds as well as senior kindergarten for 5-year-olds, Ontario has close to 22,000 children (out of a total kindergarten-age population of 232,500) who attend both kindergarten and child care. Both 4- and 5-year-olds generally attend kindergarten for a half-day, although close to 1,500 children go to full-day senior kindergarten, a particularly popular option in French-language school boards. A few school boards have opted for a full day/alternate day schedule.

Starting in the mid-1970s, communities started child care programs in classrooms that had become vacant due to declining school enrollment. By the late 1980s, although school boards did not operate child care, most large school boards had child care programs in their schools. Many had staff with responsibility for promoting coordination between schools and school-based child care.

In 1987, the provincial government announced funding to build a child care centre as part of every new school. The Ministry of Education provided the capital funds and the Ministry of Community and Social Services provided operating grants, start-up funds and subsidies for parents who qualified. In 1989, the province made it mandatory for school boards to deliver both junior and senior kindergarten throughout Ontario as of 1992.

Building on this momentum, the new government elected in 1990 continued both to expand child care and promote school/child care coordination. By 1995, child care had grown from 110,000 to 128,000 spaces and almost half of the child care centres in the province were located in schools. The provincial Royal Commission on Learning recommended the implementation of a non-compulsory early childhood education program consisting of full-day kindergarten combined with, where desired, child care for children ages 3 to 5. Planning for pilot projects consistent with this recommendation got under way. The Education Act was amended to allow school boards to operate child care, although few have done so.

The change of provincial government in 1995 meant more changes for early childhood education. Reversing the 1989 policy, the government announced that school boards no longer were required to provide junior kindergarten for 4-year-olds and changed the amount of grant per child. When 22 boards exited the program, communities lost more than 20,000 junior kindergarten spaces,

Early Childhood Services

with an accompanying loss of 1,400 teacher jobs. The early childhood pilot project initiative was cancelled, as was the capital funding for child care space in new schools. Start-up grants are no longer available, replaced by a health and safety fund to take care of only urgently-needed repairs. The Education Act was amended once again to prohibit education spending on child care.

School boards and the early childhood education community have expressed concern that school board reorganization plus the designation of child care space in schools as technically vacant will lead to school closures and loss of child care centres in communities. Growth in kindergarten and child care essentially has virtually halted.

The Ottawa region was selected for this project for a particular reason. During the course of the study, the local public school boards were in the process of amalgamating. The Ottawa Board of Education (OBE) offered junior kindergarten while the Carleton Board of Education had divested itself of the program in 1995. In an attempt to make junior kindergarten less expensive and therefore more enticing to its new partner, the OBE initiated pilot projects that substituted early childhood educators for certificated teachers in junior kindergarten classrooms. The controversy surrounding the pilots, including a great deal of local media coverage, made research challenging but did ensure that early childhood issues were very much the subjects of public discussion during the Early Years Project research week. (The Ottawa Roman Catholic School Board stepped in to provide research sites when the public board could no longer do so.)

Alberta

Early childhood education for kindergarten-age children is similar in organization to that in other provinces. Kindergarten in Alberta falls under Education Alberta while child care funding, legislation and regulation reside with the Ministry of Community Services. Similar to Ontario, there is some municipal participation. Alberta differs from other provinces in that publicly-funded kindergartens, officially known as Early Childhood Services and started in 1972, do not have to be operated by school boards and located in schools, although most are. Alberta has just over 65,000 children in kindergarten, 8,465 of whom are also in child care programs.

Changes in child care funding between 1990 and 1997 were similar to those that took place in New Brunswick. Beginning April 1, 1998, operating grants were decreased, accompanied by a plan to put the savings into subsidies. Transfer payments to municipalities also declined. At the same time, staff-child ratios were improved in child care centres.

The entire children's services landscape, including child care, was reorganized at the local level with the creation of 17 Children's Authorities. These organizations have a mandate to coordinate all children's services except education and can contract provision to the private sector.

Kindergarten experienced a series of major funding changes. In 1993, the newly-elected provincial government announced sweeping expenditure reductions throughout the public sector. Kindergarten funding was reduced to cover 200 hours rather than the usual 446 hours a year. Children could attend kindergarten at public expense for half of the school year. If parents wanted them

to continue, they would be charged fees. After an enormous public outcry, a lawsuit involving Edmonton Public Schools and a move to bring the province into line with the other western provinces, funding was reinstated to the 400-hour-a-year level (almost, but not quite, a half day every day).

Parent Views

Introduction

The Early Years Project sought to document the views of parents of kindergarten-age children regarding the curriculum of early childhood programs and their preferred system for delivering those services. Specifically, the research project had the following objectives with respect to parents' attitudes and preferences:

- to document parents' views regarding the curriculum goals in early childhood programs serving kindergarten-age children
- to assess, through the use of focus groups and surveys, parents' views on early childhood service needs (to obtain their suggestions and assess their openness to new models of service provision for early childhood education)
- to use parent survey data to assess the impact of experience with various types of early childhood services on parents' attitudes towards new alternative models
- to examine, through the use of focus groups, parents' suggestions for and assessments of the possibility of new models of early childhood education service provision.

This chapter describes parents' views on early childhood programs for their kindergarten-age children. It compares their opinions on the goals of kindergarten and child care programs and documents their reactions to a proposed coordinated program model. The chapter relies on two primary data sources, one quantitative and one qualitative.

The quantitative data are from a telephone survey of a sample of 275 parents in the four study communities. The survey used a structured questionnaire with both closed- and open-ended questions to probe parents' experiences with and attitudes towards early childhood programs. Respondents (all parents of kindergarten-age children) were recruited through sampled schools and child care centres in the four study communities.

The qualitative data are from focus discussion groups conducted with a subsample of the surveyed parents in those study communities. At the end of the parent interview, respondents were asked about their willingness to participate in a focus group discussion on the subject of early childhood education programs. The qualitative research component was intended both to validate the survey findings and to obtain in-depth views about the reasons underlying parental attitudes and

preferences regarding early childhood programs. (See Appendix for a description of study methods.)

The primary focus of the parent survey was on what parents want from their children's early childhood program, whether they had different expectations from kindergarten compared with child care programs, and what they thought specifically about coordination or integration of these programs.

Characteristics of the parents

survey sample

The Early Years Project used a sample of 275 parents of kindergarten and junior kindergarten-age children, generally between the ages of 4 and 6 years, with the majority (66 percent) 5 years of age. The breakdown of sampled parents by study community was: 80 from Ottawa, Ontario (May 1997); 68 from Fredericton, New Brunswick (May 1997); 60 from Edmonton, Alberta (November 1997) and 67 from Québec City, Québec (November 1997). The survey respondent was the parent identified as most knowledgeable about children's activities; 89 percent of respondents were female and 11 percent were male. Across all four study sites, 62 percent of parents surveyed reported English as the language of the household, 36 percent of households used French and the remaining 2 percent of households spoke other languages. In the Québec study site, the great majority (91 percent) reported French as the language of the household.

Respondents ranged in age from 21 to 49 years. The sample reflected a variety of educational levels. About 22 percent had some high school or had graduated from high school. About 30 percent had completed community college or technical school or had some university. Just under half (48 percent) had completed university (including postgraduate).

The survey asked about each respondent's main activity. Half (50 percent) indicated their main activity was 'working and caring for children.' About one-quarter (26 percent) said they were 'caring for children;' 14 percent responded that they were 'working' and smaller proportions were 'attending school full-time' (2.5 percent); 'caring for children and attending school' (4.7 percent); 'recovering from illness' (1 percent); 'looking for work' (1 percent); and 'other' (.8 percent).

With regard to the hours of work and schedules of employed parents, 48 percent of the respondents reported working full time and 20 percent reported working part time. With regard to work schedule, 44 percent of respondents reported that they work full, regular days.

Looking at the worktime breakdown by gender of parent respondents, 61 percent of the males in the sample work full time and 46 percent of the female respondents work full time.

A majority of the surveyed households were two-parent families; only 17 percent reported that there was only one adult in the household.

focus groups

Seven focus groups were conducted with 45 parents of kindergarten-age children in the study communities of Fredericton, Québec City, Edmonton and Ottawa. Two groups, one English-speaking and the other French-speaking, were held in all communities except Edmonton. The Edmonton group was conducted in English. Most focus group members (88 percent) were female and 12 percent were male. All participants had children currently attending kindergarten or junior kindergarten. Most also had current or recent experience with various types of formal and informal child care. In recruiting focus group participants, every effort was made to invite parents with varied sociodemographic backgrounds and a range of experiences with child care programs.

areas of importance to parents in early childhood education programs

The survey asked for parents' views on the factors they consider important in an ideal early childhood education program. Respondents were read a list of 20 program attributes (methodology available upon request) and were asked to use a ten-point scale to indicate the relative importance of each. It is interesting to note that for almost all of the features ranked, there was agreement among parents across the various sites.

The items that parents ranked of highest importance were those dealing with social and language skills. Parents stated that children learning how to 'cooperate and share with other children' was of highest importance (mean rank 9.30). Within the four highest ranked areas was another social area, 'making friends with other children' (mean rank 9.13). The second and third top-ranked areas were language-related: 'understanding language' (ranked 9.28) and 'using language' (ranked 9.23).

At the opposite extreme, and thus ranked lowest in relative importance to parents for early childhood education programs, were 'learning to write' (mean rank 6.67) and 'learning to read' (mean rank 6.52).

The focus group sessions examined parents' values about early childhood education to find out what they wanted and expected for their kindergarten-age children. Focus group sessions with parents identified a number of areas of consensus. There was unanimous support in the focus groups for the following principles:

- Early childhood education, in general, must initiate children's acquisition of social skills outside the home.
- Child care and kindergarten must provide a learning continuum that prepares children to participate fully in grade one.
- Children must feel safe and loved as individuals.
- Children must be stimulated to enjoy learning, interact appropriately with their peers and authorities, and strive for personal achievement.

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- Children's individual needs must be addressed by qualified and caring professionals.
- Parents must be able to communicate readily with teachers and child care staff about their children's individual problems, opportunities and potential.

child care and kindergarten compared

The survey asked parents to compare kindergarten and child care programs with respect to a list of features. After being asked to indicate their views on the relative importance of each of a number of program characteristics, they were asked to indicate whether the two programs were similar or different with regard to these various program features. Table 1 identifies the eight features out of the 20 in the survey that a majority of parents felt were similar, and indicates how parents ranked each in importance.

As noted previously, the feature ranked first in importance was 'cooperating and sharing with other children.' This was also the feature on which the greatest proportion of parents (70 percent) felt kindergarten and child care centres placed the same emphasis. It is also of interest that, as will be discussed later in this report, both kindergarten teachers and child care staff ranked this feature as highest in importance. There appears to be common agreement that this feature represents a key learning goal for Canadian early childhood education programs.

There were also many program areas for which smaller proportions of parents felt that kindergarten and child care centres placed similar emphasis.

Table 1
Similarity of Emphasis in Kindergarten and Child Care

Activity or Program Feature	Importance (Rank)	Parents Reporting Similarity of Emphasis in Kindergarten and Child Care (%)
Cooperating/sharing with other children	1	70
Getting along with adults	5	66
Making friends with other children	4	60
Art	13	59
Fine motor physical activities	9	58
Gross motor physical activities	6	58
Creative activities	7	58
Group time	8	53

The questionnaire also used an open-ended format question to probe parents' views on the differences between kindergarten and child care. A large proportion of the parents from all study sites (83 percent) characterized kindergarten as being more academic and cited that fact as the main difference between the two programs. Almost as many parents (78 percent) identified kindergarten's more academic emphasis as an advantage which kindergarten has over child care. When this issue was probed in focus groups, Alberta was the only province where parents discussed the need for what they called 'preschools' to prepare children for the more academic kindergarten environment.

Parents hold different and more varied views on the advantages of child care, 60 percent cited a variety of advantages of child care relative to kindergarten. The two strongest advantages cited were the greater number of staff and more opportunities for play.

The focus groups used a qualitative approach to explore parents' views on the differences between kindergarten and child care programs. Focus group participants viewed child care primarily as a place of nurture, fun and socialization. Kindergarten, on the other hand, was seen as a somewhat more disciplined setting – one in which children are introduced to academic subjects through games and other enjoyable activities.

Focus group leaders also asked parents to compare the skill sets of kindergarten teachers and child care staff. Among parents in provinces with training requirements for child care staff, there was a belief that child care staff have received formal college training in early childhood education programs, and thus have the required knowledge base. There was general agreement among parents that while child care facilities should be managed by trained early childhood educators, the most important qualities for child care workers were their love of children and their ability to nurture, supervise, amuse and stimulate them.

It was important to parents that kindergarten teachers are university trained. Many parents believe in the importance of special training in early childhood education in addition to a basic degree in education.

While many parents in the focus groups questioned the amount of learning that can take place in a kindergarten class with a student-teacher ratio of 20:1 at best, there was widespread opposition to the notion of replacing qualified kindergarten teachers with college-trained early childhood educators, even on a two-for-one basis. There was consensus among parents that in kindergarten classes, any interaction between early childhood educators and kindergarten students should take place under the guidance and supervision of a qualified teacher.

appropriate ages for full- and half-day kindergarten

The survey asked parents' views on the ideal age a child should attain for full- and half-day kindergarten programs. The majority of the parents across all study sites (64 percent) believed that age 5 is ideal for a full-day program. There was some interprovincial variation ranging from 54 percent in Ontario and 58 percent in Alberta to 69 percent in Quebec and 75 percent in New Brunswick. Those provinces in which full-day kindergartens are the norm had higher proportions of

parents believing that 5-year-olds are ready for such programs. These results reflect the finding by Corter and Park [1993] that parents and practitioners who had seen full-day kindergarten endorsed it, but others thought it was too long for 5-year-olds. Only about one-quarter of parents surveyed felt that a child should be age 6 or 7 for a full-day program.

Most parents (63 percent) believed that children should be at least 4 years old for a half-day program.

parent views on the integrated/coordinated program model

In the survey, parents were read the following description of the integrated/coordinated program model:

Over the last number of years, there have been discussions regarding new ways to offer child care and kindergarten programs. These new programs provide a combination of full-day, year-round care and education programs through the school system for children of kindergarten age. Like kindergarten and child care now, children can attend but do not have to attend. Parents may choose to have their child in a half school day or a full school day or an extended day. The programs are staffed by trained staff, both teachers and early childhood educators.

Respondents were asked to indicate how favourable they would find this system of early childhood education for 4- and 5-year-old children. The survey asked them to use a five-point bi-polar scale to indicate how favourable the model would be for each of the following six 'constituencies': themselves, families, children, child care staff, kindergarten teachers and the community.

A majority of parents (approximately 75 percent) indicated that, for themselves, they would find the system extremely or somewhat favourable (points 4 or 5 on the scale).

Looking at respondents' views of how favourable the model would be from the perspectives of the various other constituencies, approximately half of the sampled parents across all study sites believed that it was extremely favourable (scale point 5) from the perspectives of (in decreasing frequency): families (55 percent), children (50 percent), community (50 percent), and those parents with primary responsibility for child care themselves (50 percent). Parents were somewhat less convinced of how favourable the model would be for those staffing these programs. Only 44 percent of parents felt the model would be extremely favourable (scale point 5) for child care staff and kindergarten teachers.

Only a minority, ranging from seven to 17 percent across the various study sites, indicated that the model was not at all favourable (point 1 on the scale) from their own perspective.

The survey also asked parents about what factors might or might not make this model more favourable to them. Given a list of such factors, the one identified as having the greatest positive

impact on their evaluation of the model was a cost factor – a provision that there be no fee for the portion of the program that covers the normal school day, with the program supported by taxes. As indicated in Table 2, which summarizes the factors identified by a majority of parents as making the model more favourable, 71 percent of parents indicated that such a funding arrangement would make them more favourable towards the program.

Table 2 Parent Views on Factors to Make Model More Favourable	
Activity or Program Feature	Percentage of Parents Choosing the Response
The portion of the program that covers the normal school day will have no fee and will be supported by taxes.	71
The program will be located in school buildings.	68
The program will be introduced gradually over a period of three years, with a small number of schools being selected to serve as demonstration sites. The program will be refined over this period with input from parents and staff before more schools are added to the program.	68
The program will link with school curricula in later grades.	67
The program will be more cost-effective than the current split programs.	64
There will be a fee based on family income for that part of the program that is outside of regular school hours and for the summer months.	60
The program will mean more government funding than is currently the case because it will serve more children overall.	60
All 4- and 5-year-old children may attend the program if their parents wish, including the program hours outside normal school hours and for the summer months.	52

The survey also examined factors which parents felt would make the model less favourable. The two issues raised in this context related to ages of eligible children and program location. Either expanding age eligibility down to age 3 (67 percent indicated that this change would make the model less favourable) or limiting it to 5-year-olds (56 percent said this change would make it less favourable) decreased the appeal of the model. Similarly, locating the model in child care centres would make it less favourable for 53 percent of the parents surveyed.

The focus groups expanded parents' reactions to the fully coordinated model of education and child care. Most parents supported the principle of child care services being available at the schools where their children attended kindergarten. There was almost unanimous approval of the concept of a program which would be available on either a full- or part-time basis, according to the particular needs of individual families. Parents expressed both positive and negative reactions to the coordinated model in which programs were delivered through the school system.

On the positive side was parents' level of confidence that their children would be:

- cared for by trained professionals in safe and secure premises
- learning preschool skills
- avoiding the risks and wasted time associated with travel between multiple arrangements
- benefitting from continuity of care.

On the negative side were parents' concerns about:

- bureaucratic management and vulnerability to arbitrary budget cuts
- possibility that child care programs in a school setting might become too structured for 4-year-olds
- increase of child care staff-child ratios up to the kindergarten level
- substitution of university-educated kindergarten teachers with less qualified child care staff, with a resulting downgrading of the academic component of kindergarten programs
- reduction in the range and variety of program options available to parents
- risks for vulnerable younger children in environments including older children, unless separate facilities were reserved for the younger age groups.

overall appeal of the model: a summary measure

We can use the survey data to combine the ratings respondents gave for each of the six items in the question on the appeal of the new model to various constituencies. Using this index, we can then examine characteristics of parents who express more or less enthusiasm for the model.

The index was created by summing up parents' ratings across the six items (how favourable for yourself, children, the community, teachers, child care staff and families). We believe that this index is a measure of overall approval ratings for this model and gives a sense of whether parents thought that the model was a good idea in general, regardless of whether they would use it themselves.

The highest possible score was 30, which was obtained if a respondent answered '5' (extremely favourable) for each of these constituencies. It was determined that each individual item was highly intercorrelated ($>.8$), indicating that we really are measuring the same thing with each one. Pearson correlations or difference of means statistics then were computed (depending on whether the variables were ordinal or nominal) between the index and a number of variables. The results indicated some of the general characteristics of the parents more favourable to the model.

One of the specific objectives of studying parents' views, as indicated in the introduction to this chapter, was to use parent survey data to assess the impact of experience with various types of early childhood services on parents' attitudes towards alternative models – i.e., who liked it and who did not.

Examining the factors significantly (using a significance level of .10) related to the model, we found that parents' experience with various kinds of early childhood programs did appear to influence how favourable they were towards the model. In particular, parents using only child care were the most favourable to the model (26.9), followed by those using both child care and kindergarten (24.4), while those using kindergarten (22.3) were least favourable. It should be pointed out, however, that at only 5.5 percent of the total, parents using only child care for their children represent a small proportion of the parent sample. In addition, these parents most likely had 4-year-olds who had not yet entered kindergarten.

Other factors significantly related to favouring the model included respondents' occupation, with those in professional/managerial occupations most favourable (24.0), followed by those in service/clerical sector occupations (23.8), while those in blue-collar occupations were least favourable (16.2). The location of current child care arrangement also was related significantly to favouring the model. Those parents whose children attend a child care centre located in a school building were the most favourable (26.6), compared to those using child care in another location (24.2). Provincial location did not make a difference in the results.

awareness of recent changes

As already noted, the study communities were selected from provinces characterized by recent changes in both kindergarten and child care program and policy. The survey investigated parents' awareness of such changes in early childhood education in their respective communities. Just over half of parent respondents (52 percent) indicated an awareness of such change. This proportion was highly variable from one province to another, with one-quarter (25 percent) of New Brunswick parents reporting awareness of change (which took place in 1992) and more than three-quarters (77

percent) of Québec parents reporting awareness of change. The proportions of parents reporting awareness of recent early childhood education changes in Alberta and Ontario were 47 percent and 57 percent, respectively.

The parents with the highest levels of awareness of change, from the Québec and Ontario study communities, had experienced recent and highly-publicized changes in early childhood services. Among the Québec parents, the recent change cited was the province's introduction of full-day kindergarten for children age 5, which had been implemented in fall 1997. Among the sampled Ontario parents, the change cited by most parents was a move to use child care educators in junior kindergarten classrooms, a high-profile issue in the study community at the time of the field work for this project.

parents' suggestions for change

The survey asked parents an open-ended question to determine whether there were any changes they would like to see in the provision of early childhood education programs in their respective communities. While a majority of parents (64 percent) volunteered at least one such change, their specific responses were quite varied, with no single suggestion receiving a high degree of support. The largest single changes identified were improvement of the child-teacher ratio (12 percent) and provision of universal access to all early childhood education programs (11 percent). Only seven percent of the sampled parents suggested that child care and kindergarten programs should work together more, with most of the parents volunteering this suggestion coming from Ontario.

Conclusions

Both survey and focus group results indicated that parents have clear expectations from their children's early childhood educational programming. Parents in all the study sites stressed the importance of children's early learning of social skills and language development. Parents do not view either child care or kindergarten programs as a time for children to get a jump start on the academic skills of reading or writing.

Three-quarters of parents found the proposed coordinated model of early childhood programs favourable. Fifty-five percent of the total sample stated that it would be extremely favourable for families. They expressed some concern that an integrated/coordinated model might result in downgrading the qualifications of those teaching in such programs or lose the more favourable staff-child ratios which characterized child care compared with kindergarten programs.

Looking at the characteristics of parents who were generally more positive about the new coordinated model, the data suggested a tendency for parents who had used child care for their children to be more positive than those who had used only kindergarten. In addition, parents' occupation also was found to be related to their views of the model, with those in professional/managerial occupations most favourable, followed by those in service/clerical sector occupations, while those in

blue-collar occupations were least favourable. Finally, the location of parents' current child care arrangement also was related to their feelings towards the proposed coordinated model. Parents whose children currently attended a child care centre located in a school building were the most favourable towards the proposed new coordinated model.

Practitioner Views

Introduction

The Early Years Project had the following objectives with regard to the two practitioner groups, kindergarten teachers and child care staff:

- to document and compare curriculum and program goals of kindergarten teachers and child care staff
- to compare the sociodemographic profiles of sampled kindergarten teachers and child care staff
- to examine patterns of interaction between the two professional groups – kindergarten teachers and child care staff in the study sites
- to survey the views of front line staff – kindergarten teachers and child care staff – regarding the current environment and new models of service provision, including the potential impact of new models on the Early Childhood Education (ECE) workforce
- to document how changes have affected early childhood services, with particular attention to the impact that changes in one sector may have on other sectors.

This chapter describes practitioners' views on early childhood programs for kindergarten-age children. It compares their opinions on the goals of kindergarten and child care programs, their views on the differences and similarities between the two programs, and their reactions to a proposed coordinated program model. The chapter relies on two primary data sources, one quantitative and one qualitative.

The quantitative data are from a telephone survey of a sample of 49 kindergarten teachers and a sample of 73 child care staff. The survey used a structured questionnaire with both closed- and open-ended questions to probe practitioners' direct experiences with and attitudes towards early childhood programs. Respondents, all currently working in programs for kindergarten-age children, were recruited through sampled schools and child care centres in the four study communities. The qualitative data were from interviews conducted, in most cases, in person or, in several instances, by telephone, with a total of 39 practitioners who worked directly with kindergarten-age children in the sampled schools and child care centres in the four study sites.

Characteristics of the practitioners

The majority of the practitioners surveyed were female (more than 90 percent in both the kindergarten teacher and child care staff samples). The two groups differed by age, educational level and years of experience. As a group, kindergarten teachers were older than the child care sample. The majority of teachers (54 percent) were 40 or older. The median age reported for the kindergarten teachers was 43 years. The majority of the child care staff respondents (54 percent) were age 30 or younger. The median age reported for child care staff was 28 years. A wide range of ages was represented in both samples, with the teacher sample representing respondents from all age groups from 21-25 years to 51-55 years, and the child care sample including respondents from under 21 years to 56-60 years of age.

The kindergarten teacher sample had a higher educational level than the child care sample. Most of the kindergarten teachers had either a B.A. (54 percent) or a B.Ed. (38 percent); the remaining eight percent had either a M.A. or M.Ed. degree. Just over one-quarter of all of the kindergarten teachers (27 percent) reported having specialized in Early Childhood Education as part of their formal training. Among the child care sample, just over one-third had a B.A. (36 percent) or a B.Ed. (37 percent); two-thirds (66 percent) had an ECE diploma; and 10.9 percent reported no diploma or degree from a college or university program.

Kindergarten teachers reported an average of 15.7 years of general teaching experience, with an average of 2.4 years teaching in the early childhood education field. Child care staff reported an average of 9.4 years of experience in the early childhood education field.

Both professions want respect. Child care staff seem to feel that they are held in low esteem (but, interestingly, resist the idea of further education). Kindergarten teachers appear to be more worried about lack of credibility with other teachers and are sometimes at pains to ensure that they are not mistaken for child care staff.

Program goals and objectives

program goals

The surveys asked both groups of practitioners, kindergarten teachers and child care staff, to identify the three most important goals for children in their program. The most frequent answers that they volunteered to this open-ended question suggested essential agreement between the practitioner groups, although with somewhat different emphases in the two groups. Table 3 reports the four goals cited most frequently by the two practitioner groups. The great majority of kindergarten teachers (80 percent) identified 'socialization of child' as their primary goal. Among the child care staff, 'socialization of child' was the second most frequently mentioned goal, with just under half (48 percent) identifying this as one of their three most important goals. The top-mentioned goal for child care staff was 'intellectual development of child,' mentioned by 59 percent. This was the second-ranked program goal identified by teachers, with 69 percent identifying intellectual development as one of their three most important goals for children.

Table 3
Most Important Goals for Children

Kindergarten teachers (%)	Child care staff (%)
Socialization of child (80)	Intellectual development of child (59)
Intellectual development of child (69)	Socialization of child (48)
Building a child's self-esteem (39)	Providing a safe environment (42)
Providing a safe environment (20)	Building a child's self-esteem (29)

areas of importance in early childhood programs

The Early Years Project surveys of both practitioner groups permit comparison of their relative priorities in specified early childhood educational program areas. It is also of interest to consider parental views on the relative importance of these program areas. The Early Years Project asked parents the same questions that were asked of child care practitioners regarding the relative importance of various program activities. Table 4 shows the average scores and rankings for parents, kindergarten teachers and child care staff. According to the survey data, teachers and child care staff were in fundamental agreement on which activities or program areas are most and least important in an ideal program, according to their mean scores on a ten-point scale of importance (Table 4). Their views in this regard were in accord with those expressed by parents on the Early Years Project parent survey. Asked to use the scale to indicate the degree of importance of a list of 20 activities, in both practitioner groups the largest proportion of respondents rated 'cooperating/sharing with other children' as most important.

Both groups ranked as second 'making friends with other children.' Parents' scores were similar, although this factor ranked slightly lower in the parents' priorities. The two activities ranked lowest in importance (although in reverse order) were the most explicitly academic activities, 'learning to write' and 'learning to read.' Again, parental views were in basic agreement with both practitioner groups.

The greatest discrepancy in the practitioner groups' ratings of the importance of program areas was on 'blocks and other math activities,' which was ranked 4th in importance by the teachers but close to the bottom (18th) by child care staff. Parents' rankings fell mid-way between those of the two practitioner groups. Other program areas in which the practitioners' ratings indicated disagreement were: 'free play' (ranked 5th by child care staff, 13th by teachers and 15th by the parents); 'space to be alone' (ranked 8th in importance by child care staff and 16th by both teachers and parents); 'sand/water and science activities' (ranked 14th by child care staff and parents, and 7th by teachers); and 'group time' (ranked 12th by child care staff, 6th by teachers and 8th by parents).

Table 4
Average Scores and Rankings for Early Childhood Program Curriculum Areas
by Parents, Kindergarten Teachers and Child Care Staff

Program Feature	Parents	Kindergarten Teachers	Child Care Staff
Cooperating/sharing with other children	9.30 (1)	9.59 (1)	9.23 (1)
Understanding language	9.28 (2)	9.28 (3)	8.94 (6)
Using language	9.23 (3)	9.22 (5)	9.02 (3)
Making friends with other children	9.13 (4)	9.55 (2)	9.19 (2)
Getting along with adults	8.75 (5)	8.98 (8)	8.93 (7)
Gross motor physical activities	8.65 (6)	8.81 (10)	8.85 (9)
Creative activities	8.58 (7)	8.86 (9)	9.00 (4)
Group time	8.44 (8)	9.00 (6)	8.54 (12)
Fine motor physical activities	8.40 (9)	8.59 (12)	8.45 (15)
Reasoning/problem solving	8.27 (10)	8.53 (14)	8.59 (11)
Blocks and other math activities	8.06 (11)	9.24 (4)	8.22 (18)
Music/dance/movement	8.04 (12)	8.33 (15)	8.32 (17)
Art	8.02 (13)	8.26 (17)	8.42 (16)
Sand/water and other science activities	7.92 (14)	8.98 (7)	8.49 (14)
Free play	7.84 (15)	8.59 (13)	8.97 (5)
Space to be alone	7.78 (16)	8.31 (16)	8.92 (9)
Cultural awareness	7.75 (17)	8.02 (18)	8.51 (13)
Dramatic play	7.59 (18)	8.73 (11)	8.60 (10)
Learning to write	6.67 (19)	6.67 (19)	6.00 (20)
Learning to read	6.52 (20)	5.34 (20)	6.03 (19)

Kindergarten teachers and child care staff were in virtual agreement when asked to use the same ten-point scale to indicate the relative importance of various additional program features. As reported in Table 5, both practitioner groups assigned identical top and bottom rankings, with 'staff attentiveness to children' ranked most important and 'physical facilities' ranked lowest in relative importance.

Table 5
Average Scores and Rankings for Program Features
by Parents, Kindergarten Teachers and Child Care Staff

Program Feature	Parents	Kindergarten Teachers	Child Care Staff
Staff attentiveness to children	9.73 (1)	9.77 (1)	9.84 (1)
Number of children	9.08 (3)	9.69 (2)	9.33 (3)
Number of staff	9.12 (2)	9.45 (3)	9.54 (2)
Qualifications of staff (e.g., has degree)	8.96 (4)	9.41 (4)	9.28 (4)
Equipment	8.06 (6)	8.67 (5)	8.78 (5)
Physical facilities	8.28 (5)	8.65 (6)	8.63 (6)

The survey also asked both practitioner groups an open-ended question about considering their own program and identifying the three most important goals for children. Table 6 summarizes and compares these responses. While both groups attached importance to the 'socialization of the child,' a higher proportion of kindergarten teachers (80 percent) cited this as a key factor than did child care staff (48 percent). Both groups ranked 'the child's intellectual development' as important. More child care staff (42 percent) than kindergarten teachers (20 percent) identified 'providing a safe environment' as one of their three main goals.

Table 6
Main Program Goals Identified by
Kindergarten Teachers and Child Care Staff

Program Goal	Kindergarten Teachers Identifying Goal (%)	Child Care Staff Identifying Goal (%)
Socialization of child	80	48
Intellectual development of child	69	59
Building a child's self-esteem	39	29
Providing a safe environment	20	42

child care and kindergarten compared

The survey also asked practitioners to make explicit comparisons between the two types of early childhood programs on the various program features that they had rated in importance. For each program feature, they were asked to indicate whether there was similar or different emphasis in kindergarten and child care programs. For all program areas identified as different, respondents were asked to indicate whether it was emphasized more in kindergarten or child care programs.

similarities

Table 7 indicates the program areas identified as having the same emphasis by a majority of both practitioner groups. Included among the program features that practitioners identified as similar were: areas relating to social skills (cooperating with children and with adults and making friends), fine motor physical activities, reasoning and problem-solving, and language-related skills.

Table 7 Curriculum Areas Identified by a Majority of Kindergarten Teachers and Child Care Staff as Having Similar Emphasis in Both Programs		
Curriculum Area	Kindergarten Teachers (%)	Child Care Staff (%)
Cooperating/sharing with other children	80	69
Getting along with adults	67	59
Fine motor physical activities	57	67
Reasoning/problem-solving	53	53
Making Friends	51	56
Understanding language	51	55
Using language	51	63

differences

Most kindergarten teachers and child care staff agreed that 'learning to read' and 'learning to write' were areas emphasized more in kindergarten than in child care programs. There were 61 percent of kindergarten teachers and 71 percent of child care staff surveyed who indicated that 'learning to read' received more emphasis in kindergarten programs; 65 percent of kindergarten teachers and 66 percent of child care staff felt that 'learning to write' was emphasized more in kindergarten than in child care programs.

A majority of kindergarten teacher survey respondents (65 percent) and of child care staff (71 percent) felt that child care centres are characterized by higher numbers of staff.

Asked an open-ended survey question about the differences between these two sectors, 87 percent of kindergarten teachers and 65 percent of child care staff volunteered that kindergarten is 'more academic.' These views are consistent with those expressed by parents.

Program comparisons: Interview data

teachers' views: child development and learning objectives

When the personal interviewers asked practitioners to compare the two programs, a number of the kindergarten teachers described their learning objectives. One teacher began with the similarities, but then addressed the differences between the programs:

In both settings, the children learn through play. In both settings, most of the skills are acquired through group interaction. In both settings, we emphasize the social and emotional development of the children, and use the same kind of activities to stimulate the children. Both settings have the same gross and fine motor activities. However, in kindergarten the setting is more structured and your objectives are more specific. You need to attain them during the year if you want the child to be ready for school. Attaining your development goals is important [in kindergarten], while in child care it is not as important.

Another kindergarten teacher interviewed said:

Both settings have similar child development objectives. However, in kindergarten we add learning language and communication skills, and developing a sense of structure and discipline.

child care staff views: preparation for life versus preparation for school

Key informant interviews with child care staff also emphasize the specific learning objectives which characterize kindergarten compared with child care and consider the different roles of teacher and child care staff. The following three child care staff responses highlight the perceived differences:

Child care is child-directed. Kindergarten is teacher-directed. [There are] large groups in kindergarten and different philosophies in early childhood education. A child can learn on his own if presented with opportunities – self-confidence and esteem.

[Child care is] much less structured than kindergarten. Child care has more play. Although we have development objectives, we don't need to achieve specific goals. All our program is structured around play. In kindergarten, there is more 'teaching'.

In child care, there is structure as there is in kindergarten, but it is more relaxed and less goal-oriented. There is more freedom in child care to do what you want – you don't have to be in the group all the time. We share the same goals of overall child development – intellectual, physical, social, emotional – but we are more into the child's individual pace. In child care, we prepare the children for life whereas in kindergarten, they prepare them for school.

practitioner reactions to the coordinated model

In the survey, practitioners were read the following description of a new, integrated/coordinated model of early childhood program delivery. (See page 12 for the full text of the description of the model.)

Respondents were asked to use a five-point scale to indicate how favourably they personally would view this new system and how favourable they believe it would be for various other target groups, including children, families, the community and the two groups of practitioners.

Unlike parents, neither practitioner group expressed strong support for the new model; a majority of both groups did not favour the concept. The kindergarten teachers had a less favourable reaction to the new concept; fewer than one-quarter (24 percent) considered the model to be extremely favourable. Among the kindergarten teacher sample, the proportion who felt the model to be extremely unfavourable varied from 20 percent to 33 percent across the study sites. Child care staff were somewhat more enthusiastic, with 40 percent describing it as extremely favourable from their own perspective. At the opposite extreme, a very small proportion of child care staff (five percent) felt not at all favourable towards the new model. This response pattern was consistent across all of the study sites. When the parent survey asked the same question of parents, their response to the new model was more positive, with the majority of parents indicating that, for themselves, they found it extremely favourable. It is noteworthy that, when asked to consider how favourable the model would be from the perspective of various 'constituencies,' somewhat fewer parents (44 percent) felt that it would be extremely favourable for practitioners (see page 17).

As noted above, the survey also asked both practitioner groups to consider how favourable the model would be from the perspectives of various target groups. There was no group for whom a majority of kindergarten teachers felt that the new model would be extremely favourable. The highest rating given by teachers was for families, for whom 47 percent of teachers felt the new model would be extremely favourable. The child care staff were somewhat more enthusiastic about the benefits of the model for families; a majority of child care staff (57 percent) described the model as extremely favourable for families.

The practitioners surveyed then were asked to consider the effect of a number of conditions on their view of the program model. As reported in Table 7, their responses indicated that both practitioner groups are wary of sudden and dramatic changes in their programs. Among both groups, the highest percentage (kindergarten teachers 73 percent; child care staff 74 percent) responded that the model would be made more favourable if it were to be introduced gradually.

The specific wording of this condition was: "The program will be introduced gradually over a period of three years, with a small number of schools being selected to serve as demonstration sites. The program will be refined over this period, with input from parents and staff, before more schools are added to the program." This gradual pace for program introduction was also something which surveyed parents felt would make the model more favourable. More than two-thirds of parents (68 percent) felt that gradual introduction would make it more favourable, exactly the same percentage of parents who felt that it would benefit from a school-based location. This response ranked just under the 71 percent of parents who identified having no user fee for the part of the day covered by regular school hours as a feature that would increase the attractiveness of the model (see page 18).

Linkages between the new program and curriculum in later grades was another feature which made the model more attractive for kindergarten teachers (67 percent) and child care staff (70 percent). Basing program fees on family income levels for the portion of the program outside of regular school hours and for the summer months was another factor that made the model more favourable to a majority of kindergarten teachers (69 percent) and child care staff (60 percent). The possibility that the proposed model would be more cost-effective than the current split programs made it preferable to 51 percent of the kindergarten teachers and 67 percent of child care staff.

Table 8
Practitioners' Views on Factors That
Would Make the Proposed Model More Favourable

Factor	Kindergarten Teachers (%)	Child Care Staff (%)
The program will be introduced gradually over a period of three years with a small number of schools being selected to serve as demonstration sites. The program will be refined over this period with input from parents and staff before more schools are added to the program.	73	74
The program will be located in school buildings.	73	53
There will be a fee based on family income for that part of the program that is outside of the regular school hours and for the summer months.	69	60
The program will link with school curriculum in the later grades.	67	70
The program will be more cost-effective than the current split programs.	51	67

As did parents, both groups of practitioners expressed a preference for locating a coordinated model in school premises. Teachers felt more strongly about this locational preference; 73 percent felt a school location would make the new model more favourable compared to 53 percent of child care staff.

Practitioners also indicated the factors that would make the model less favourable. The majority of kindergarten teachers (63 percent) felt that locating the model in child care centres would make it less favourable. From the perspective of a substantial majority of child care staff (70 percent), limiting the program to 5-year-olds would make the model less favourable.

appropriate ages for full- and half-day kindergarten

The survey also asked both practitioner groups for their opinions on when children are old enough to attend half- and full-day kindergarten. The majority of the kindergarten teachers (67 percent) felt that age 5 is ideal for a full-day program; 20 percent felt that a child should be 6 years old for a full-day program. The child care staff expressed essentially the same views about children's readiness for full-day kindergarten. A majority of the child care staff (62 percent) were of the opinion that age 5 is ideal for a full-day program, and an additional 18 percent felt that a child should be 6 years old for a full-day program. A majority of parents surveyed (64 percent) felt that age 5 was ideal for a full-day kindergarten program. Approximately one-quarter of the parents felt that a child should be 6 or 7 years old for a full-day program.

The two practitioner groups were also in agreement about the ideal age for half-day kindergarten. Most kindergarten teachers (69 percent) and child care staff (62 percent) believed that children should be at least 4 years old for a half-day program. These figures were comparable to the proportion of parents (63 percent) who felt that children should be at least 4 years old for half-day kindergarten.

practitioner views on training

The personal interviews with practitioners asked them to consider and compare their own training with that of their counterparts in the other early childhood sector. Practitioners were asked to consider the idea of integrated training/career ladder 'crossovers' and to offer their opinion on the advisability of establishing a training system so that kindergarten teachers and child care staff could have access to training and credentials in both fields. On a more personal level, respondents were asked whether they could imagine themselves enrolling in training in the other field.

The responses to the question made reference to the fact that, in general, the two occupational fields are characterized by differences in pay rates and conditions of employment, benefits, status and prestige, and education and training requirements. For the most part, this differential was the reason for kindergarten teachers to oppose more integrated training and for child care staff to support it.

teachers' views towards integrated or 'crossover' training

Citing wages and working conditions, one kindergarten teacher interviewed indicated an unwillingness to work in the child care field:

There would be no real incentive. I would not want to acquire additional training. I already have a B.A. There would be a loss in working conditions.

According to another teacher interviewed:

Child care workers work longer hours and receive less pay. Kindergarten teachers are better paid and have better working conditions – paid holidays and sick leave, pension plan insurance.

One teacher interviewed compared the working conditions of the two groups:

Child care workers have poor working conditions. They work longer hours. They start earlier, finish later.

Another kindergarten teacher noted teachers' higher level of training:

I'm not that fond of that [crossover training] idea. I don't know if it would work – I needed four years to learn what I learned.

Several kindergarten teachers interviewed focussed on the status differential:

In kindergarten, we have more recognition.

They [child care staff] have less prestige. They do 'caring' tasks, such as snack time, dress-up, wash hands.

Program-level differences were cited by a smaller number of the practitioners as reasons for not wanting to integrate training for the two fields. One kindergarten teacher had given some thought to the comparison between the two programs:

In kindergarten, the children are at their best; the child care staff get them at the end of the day when they are tired and stressed. In kindergarten, we have a cohesive group; in child care, the group is irregular.

Those kindergarten teachers expressing positive views about integrated training tended to emphasize the benefits for their early childhood education colleagues. According to one teacher interviewed:

It would be a great idea if it would allow ECEs (early childhood educators) to get credit for what they have done.

Two other teachers interviewed expressed support for crossover training if associated with upgrading for ECEs:

Yes, it would open doors to ECE to get further education. If there were a crossover, there would have to be more training for child care staff.

child care staff views on integrated training

Among the child care staff interviewed, respondents were mixed on whether or not they would consider the 'crossover' training. As with the kindergarten teachers, differences in working conditions and program approaches were cited as reasons they would or would not favour such integrated training.

A number of child care staff interviewed referred to teachers' relatively higher wages:

Only for the money. More education means more money. If there were more money, I'd be there in a minute if it meant getting more money.

Because child care program budgets are based on parent fees, even if child care workers had the same training as teachers, it might not necessarily mean better wages and working conditions.

There is basically the same competency, but teachers are paid more.

If the same training would allow one to teach in kindergarten, one incentive would be the better salary.

Another child care worker interviewed referred to the differential in amount of time required to train in respective fields:

I chose child care because the training was not as long as for a teacher, and I could earn a living sooner. No incentive could make me go back to school.

Some child care staff considered the implications of integrated training at the program level:

It would help avoid a two-tier system.

We have different perspectives. If we were trained jointly, there might be more communication.

impacts of change: practitioners' views

The survey asked both groups of practitioners about recent changes that might have occurred in their community in early childhood education. Most respondents were informed about such change. Across all study communities, a majority of both kindergarten teachers (59 percent) and child care staff (64 percent) indicated that they were aware of recent changes. The types of changes most often identified included a pilot project using ECEs in junior kindergartens, introduction of full-day kindergartens, funding cuts and changes in curriculum.

Survey respondents who identified any such changes were asked to describe their feelings about these changes. Both practitioner groups were similar in their general reactions to changes. Among both the kindergarten teachers and child care staff, almost two-thirds (63 percent) of those who were aware of changes indicated that they agreed with the particular changes that had been made.

The qualitative personal interviews provided an opportunity to examine in greater depth practitioners' views about the impacts of change. The interviewers asked practitioners about recent changes in early childhood services and any impacts such changes might have produced in their respective communities. Looking at their responses by sector and by province of study community revealed considerable diversity in experience.

Québec respondents focussed on the recent implementation of full-day kindergarten. Kindergarten teachers discussed children's varied reactions to the full-day program and the challenge for teachers in "learning how to organize around a full-day schedule [and] adapting to larger groups." One teacher noted that some kindergarten-age children are not ready to attend school full time. Another agreed, noting that:

[When] children spend more time in school, they are more tired. The children need more time alone, where they don't need to be part of the group.

Another was more positive about the impact of the change on children:

I am very pleased with the implementation of full-time kindergarten. It is good for children.

Another teacher described the change as "the advantage of having the children a full day," providing teachers with an opportunity to go into programs and activities in greater depth. According to this teacher:

Children have a chance to finish activities and to explore many aspects of the same activity. They have more time to plan and discuss with others on joint projects.

Child care staff in Québec referred to the reduction in the number of hours children spend in their program:

It is more difficult to organize activities since the group is so very small.

According to some respondents, it is also important to redesign the child care programs to address needs which are not met by their school programs, thus providing "less arts and crafts and more gross motor activities." Some child care staff noted that the reduction of children's time in child care puts a financial strain on the child care sector:

Financially, it makes it more difficult to make both ends meet. The [child care] program has to fund itself.

New Brunswick practitioners from both the education and child care sectors discussed the impact of change with regard to that province's 1991 implementation of public kindergartens and the recent introduction of full-day kindergarten. Kindergarten teachers observed children's improved access to kindergarten since the introduction of a public system and the resulting improvement in children's readiness for the upper grades of school. According to one teacher:

Children have benefited greatly. There is a remarkable difference in children's adaptation to school. [They show] more readiness to learn, better listening skills and better integration to the school environment and structure.

Child care staff also noted the benefit from children's earlier introduction to the school environment. According to one child care staff:

They get to experience the school setting earlier, which prepares them for school.

Both teachers and child care staff observed that, with a few notable exceptions, private kindergartens generally have shut down since the introduction of kindergarten into the school system. Some child care staff noted the negative financial impact on their programs from moving the kindergarten-age children into school programs:

They took the best paying group out of day care. That hurt us badly.

Ontario practitioners, kindergarten teachers and child care staff noted a wide range of changes in both sectors, including a pilot program with junior kindergartens staffed by ECEs, closures of junior kindergartens, change in staff-child ratios in child care and the introduction of full-day alternate-day kindergarten programs. It was noted that closure of junior kindergarten programs in one board was a source of stress for parents, causing many to move their children to programs offered in other communities even if that required more travel time.

Both groups of Alberta practitioners noted the changes in early childhood programs and impacts on families and children resulting from changes in kindergarten program funding, in the hours of kindergarten program available and in child care funding.

As described by kindergarten teachers, the impact of Alberta's kindergarten changes were felt in two ways:

- within the kindergarten programs – *Our class size went up. Hours dropped. There was higher turnover of staff.*
- and in the programs offered in child care sector – *People started using child care more when kindergarten hours were cut.*

Conclusions

Both practitioner groups were predominantly female. The sampled kindergarten teachers, with a median age of 43, were somewhat older than the child care staff, whose median age was 28 years. The kindergarten teachers, all with university degrees, had a higher level of formal education than the child care workers. About one-quarter of the kindergarten teachers' educational training included a specialization in early childhood. Among the sampled child care staff, just over one-third (37 percent) had a B.A. or B.Ed. Two-thirds of the child care sample (66 percent) had an ECE diploma. There were 10.9 percent of the sampled child care staff who did not report having any diploma or degree from a college or university program.

In the area of program goals for early childhood programs, the Early Years Project survey data reflected areas of fundamental agreement between the two practitioner groups and the parents, as well as some key areas of disagreement. All three groups were in very strong agreement that cooperation and social skills should be the primary goals for early childhood education programs. No group believed that such explicitly academic activities as 'learning to read' or 'learning to write' should be among the primary goals in programs.

The two groups of practitioners compared the two types of early childhood programs and identified the similarities and differences in program emphases in the two sectors. Among the similarities, they included areas relating to social skills (cooperating with children and with adults and making friends), fine motor physical activities, reasoning and problem-solving, and language-related skills. Regarding differences between the programs, both groups of practitioners agreed that 'learning to read' and 'learning to write' were areas emphasized more in kindergarten than in child care programs.

Neither practitioner group expressed strong support for the new integrated/coordinated model of early childhood services program delivery. Just under one-quarter of the kindergarten teachers (24 percent) considered the model to be extremely favourable. Child care staff were somewhat more enthusiastic about the concept than were kindergarten teachers. A higher proportion of the child care staff (40 percent) considered the coordinated model as extremely favourable from their own perspective. Child care staff were even more positive when considering the proposed model from the perspective of families. A majority of the child care staff (57 percent) indicated that the new model would be extremely favourable for families. Both practitioner groups appeared to be wary of sudden and dramatic changes that would affect their programs. Both groups were more positive about the new model if it were to be introduced gradually.

A Look into Classrooms and Programs

Discussion of the relationship between programs serving kindergarten-age children requires an investigation of what actually happens in the programs. The Early Years Project included program observations to shed further light on:

- whether the early childhood program goals expressed by elected officials, administrators, teachers, child care staff, parents, advocates and representatives of professional organizations in the other parts of the study were being met in the programs themselves
- what effect legislation and funding have on what happens in classrooms and child care programs
- whether conditions like auspices (public, nonprofit or for-profit) or jurisdiction (education or social services) make a difference at the program level
- whether practitioner activities vary with program goals
- whether any particular elements appeared to stand out as contributing to higher-quality programs.

The observations also were an attempt to look at the similarities and differences in kindergartens and child care programs in the study. Our practitioner interviews confirmed that in all provinces – even those that have taken steps to coordinate programs and professions – teachers and child care staff still eye each other with suspicion and generally assume that their side of the early childhood divide is the most effective. Since the study was built, in part, on the assumption that this relationship is counterproductive, we wanted to see if we could obtain a sense of whether and where the programs were alike and different and whether the observed similarities corresponded with parent and practitioner perceptions.

the observation model

The observation method flowed from our community-based research model. Once we selected the study communities, we contacted the ministries or departments with jurisdiction over kindergarten and child care for assistance in identifying five situations (three majority-language; two minority-language) where a kindergarten and child care centre had some kind of relationship. This relationship could range from formal coordination to simply having the same children attend both programs. These programs formed a research nucleus, providing not only observation sites but survey and focus group participants, and practitioners – both kindergarten teachers and child care staff – who gave personal interviews.

Our goal, almost entirely met, was to observe each of five 'paired' kindergartens and child care centres in the four subject provinces for a total of 40 programs. In each province, we requested that we observe child care programs both on and off school premises. While this was less successful on a province-by-province basis, there was a good mix in total. Our sampling method resulted in 40 programs – 19 child care programs and 21 kindergartens. We undersampled child care in Edmonton and oversampled kindergarten. That community did not have two French-language centres with a kindergarten age group but did have kindergartens operating out of child care centres. We added one of these to our observations.

We analyzed the data for 18 child care programs and 20 kindergartens; 20 were English-language and 18 operated in French. One set of observations was not used due to concerns that the ratings were inaccurate.

Observer recruitment took place concurrent with program selection. Observers were either graduates of or students in community college early childhood education courses or university faculties of education.

The project used the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS) [Harms and Clifford 1980] as the observation protocol because it reflects North American early childhood education practice and has been used successfully for more than a decade in both kindergarten and child care programs. Use of this particular scale allows our findings to be compared with those of other studies using the ECERS.

During each research week, training (in the form of half-day group sessions) took place on Tuesday. Observations were organized for Wednesday and Thursday. Most observations took place in the morning because the two types of programs were most similar at this time (e.g., no nap scheduled for either program), although they were switched to the afternoon if this turned out to be the main program block for the kindergarten age group in the child care program. The observers were debriefed by the co-directors at the end of the week. In addition, one of the co-directors visited each site in order to have independent confirmation of the observation record.

A short note regarding our findings: The observations gave us rich information regarding early childhood education programs. Combined with the rest of our data, they helped provide a detailed description of all elements relating to the context for programs for kindergarten-age children in our study communities. The programs observed were not selected at random. Therefore, we must take care not to overgeneralize from the observation results. In particular, we cannot generalize our findings from our small set of study communities to the larger provincial contexts. Instead, these data are useful for examining apparent relationships between key variables and for generating hypotheses to be used in further research.

We also should include a note of caution regarding the ECERS. It is probably the most reliable program observation scale that exists in North America. It is, however, important to realize that, even with a scale as detailed as the ECERS, observations take place relative to a number of other influences, the most important of which is what the observers are accustomed to seeing in an early childhood program. If program quality is generally poor in a jurisdiction, observers may give mediocre programs high ratings. This problem can be noted in training sessions, but cannot always be corrected in the field.

In addition, the ECERS is dated in some areas. For example, there are no items to rate either gender equity in programs or the use of technology, such as computers. While this is an area of controversy among people who work with young children, the fact is computers are in use in early childhood programs. Furthermore, more attention needs to be paid to rating provisions for diversity in special needs, race and culture.

what we know about the programs

There was a wide range of quality in the early childhood programs observed as part of the Early Years Project, with many operating at a competent level. An overall ECERS score of 5.0 out of 7 has been identified as "indicative of a good, developmentally appropriate classroom ...". Scores within half a point of 5.0 (i.e., 4.5-4.9) were considered 'close to the target' [Bryant et al 1993: 5]. Sixty-one percent of child care centres and 70 percent of kindergartens in the EYP group scored higher than 4.5. Close to half of these (six child care, six kindergarten) scored 5.0 or above. Ontario led the total group with all but one program scoring more than 4.5 and six scoring more than 5.0.

Kindergarten outscored child care in three of the four provinces, although the difference in Ontario was very small. In Alberta, child care earned the higher score. Given that Alberta kindergarten teachers are highly educated (all in the study had education degrees and one had a special degree in early childhood education) and should be expected to provide high-quality programs, it may be that the measures taken by the provincial government over the last few years have negatively affected kindergarten in that province.

In addition, where quality is concerned, kindergartens appeared to be less variable than child care programs province to province. Mean scores for kindergartens went from a minimum of 4.31 in Québec to 5.12 in Ontario – a range of .81. Child care scores started at 3.34 in New Brunswick and rose to 5.09, again in Ontario. This greater range of 1.75 suggests that program quality for child care was more variable across the four study provinces.

What does this mean? On a purely practical level, it suggests that Canadians may not be able to move from one province to another and expect comparable levels of quality in child care. On a policy level, we should consider why two programs that enrol children of the same ages and fall under provincial jurisdiction should show such a difference of quality.

It would be easy to lay this difference at history's door, citing the fact that kindergarten has been seen, in most of Canada, as the first step to school for virtually all children for at least 50 years. Child care programs, by contrast, were not common and did not have widespread acceptance until the 1970s. A program as widely used as kindergarten has a stronger foundation on which to build quality. However, New Brunswick's kindergartens are young and still scored a respectable 4.67.

It would appear that kindergartens look more like each other than do child care programs because they are part of a system – a system used by all children. Programs within a universal system (education) have a greater public presence than those within a sector like child care which, in Canada, is not a system but more a part of what could be termed the services market. Kindergarten's public presence, combined with almost universal acceptance and use, carries with it greater public consensus regarding expectations in areas such as quality and program content. The consensus encourages authorities, whether local or provincial, to take measures that result in a similarity province-to-province. Although kindergarten attendance is compulsory in only one of the four study provinces, the system characteristics filter down from the compulsory grades and do so even when kindergarten is a recent addition.

One of the most important measures, if not the most important, that authorities take to assure the existence and stability of quality in programs for young children is to require programs to employ staff with appropriate postsecondary education. Like virtually all other studies that cover this territory, our findings suggest that staff training is the keystone of program quality and the area where legislation has the greatest impact.

All provinces require university education degrees to teach kindergarten. Alberta and Québec have special degrees in early childhood education. Although not all kindergarten teachers have this qualification, those who do form an important cohort within the profession. New Brunswick implemented a special degree program at the University of New Brunswick to educate quickly a large group of kindergarten teachers.

Ontario and Alberta require child care programs to employ various minimum numbers of community college ECE graduates, depending on the age of the children and group size. Québec has no training requirements for the school-board-operated after-school programs attended by kindergarteners, although licensed child care programs for younger children do require trained staff. Our study focussed on the after-school programs. New Brunswick has no staff training requirements at all for child care.

Our data indicated that staff training is the most important input for program quality. It appeared to be more important than funding, seemed to be primarily responsible for the level and stability of quality in the kindergartens and helped explain the variability province-to-province in child care program scores. The link between staff training and program quality has been observed in previous research [Whitebook et al 1990].

The child care mean scores in New Brunswick and Québec were 3.4 and 3.9, respectively. They were the lowest in the study. There is a significant gap between these scores and the next lowest mean of 4.6. The other 22 programs cluster in the smaller gap between 4.6 and the highest score of 5.1. Furthermore, out of 40 programs, the five with the very lowest scores, appearing at the bottom of the total group and usually trailing farthest behind their kindergarten partners, were in the two provinces that do not have a regulation for trained staff in child care programs for kindergarteners.

Did jurisdiction make a difference? In one sense, yes, in that one was more likely to find consistent quality from province to province in kindergartens operated as part of the education system. However, further work is necessary to define more fully this particular aspect within provinces. The scores for the Early Years Project's small number of programs were confounded by such factors as:

- the disruption in Alberta kindergartens over the past four years
- the fact that the after-school programs in Québec, which generated low scores, are also operated by school boards

- the data collected in Ontario were from a region with well-resourced child care programs and highly professionalized staff. The same results may not appear province-wide.

The relationship between child care quality and location (school/nonschool) was overtaken somewhat by the staff training variable because all of the Québec child care programs with the second-lowest scores in the study were located in schools. Where the other study communities are concerned, seven of the nine child care programs in Ottawa and Edmonton were in schools, compared with one of the five in Fredericton (one other was located in part of a school-community complex). As previously noted, Ontario and Alberta child care programs outscored those in New Brunswick and Québec, but we will not be able to draw conclusions about the influence of location on quality until we can eliminate training as a variable.

Does quality increase with greater coordination between kindergarten and child care? A general lack of coordination between the study kindergartens and child care centres made our results somewhat inconclusive. However, sites where there was evidence of attention to this aspect were more likely to have higher ECERS scores. It is also important to note that Ottawa and environs, the community that generated the highest scores for both child care and kindergarten, is in a province that between 1987 and 1995 strongly encouraged school-child care coordination. In addition, the Ottawa schools in which the study child care centres were located were in one of the most active school boards in the province in this regard. The attention to program matters that coordination support necessitates either comes from or generates close attention to elements of program quality.

One final aspect merits discussion. The lowest scores for child care for kindergarten-age children occurred in the programs observed in New Brunswick and Québec, the two provinces with full-day kindergarten. The child care programs observed in New Brunswick were of particular concern, since at 3.4, the sector score is well below the score of 4.5 identified as acceptable by Bryant et al [1993]. If one looks at programs for young children in their entirety, this may not be very serious if the full-day kindergarten programs were of acceptable quality, as happened in the study kindergartens in this instance. It is possible that the implementation of full-day kindergarten in New Brunswick, despite a concurrent loss of child care spaces, may have increased access to good-quality early childhood education for the children of that province. However, this aspect requires further study using larger representative samples of programs.

Furthermore, if we were to assume that all programs where children spend time should achieve a sound standard of quality, we should begin to re-think what happens to the child care part of the day when children attend full-day kindergarten. The balance shifts, since kindergarteners attend school for five hours a day and child care for approximately three hours as opposed to the six hours they would spend in child care if they attended kindergarten for the usual half day. In other words, in the event that full-day kindergarten becomes the norm, how can we prevent the child care from becoming residual, with all of the implications for quality that this entails? How can we ensure that the nonschool parts of the day support programs that children will enjoy and parents will want to use?

The answers to this question lie in both organization and program content. First, if staff training and education are essential contributors to quality, programs should be organized in ways that will attract and support trained staff. One challenge involves organizing programs in ways that provide at least one full-time position for a trained staff. Program integration helps solve this problem if the program is staffed with a team consisting of a teacher and trained early childhood staff who work in overlapping six- or seven-hour shifts. If integration is too big a step, at the very least child care programs should have one full-time trained staff member who would be responsible for administration and quality assurance. It is impossible to provide a program of any quality with untrained staff working a few hours a day. Adopting program models with at least one full-time staff where such programs do not exist will increase costs, and so we recommend that programs be funded in ways that will make them affordable for parents.

Given that program integration is likely to proceed slowly, if at all, we should reconsider what actually happens in a child care program for children attending full-day kindergarten. It should not be necessary, or even desirable, for such a program to have the same level of intense early childhood education activities that one finds in a child care program of longer daily duration. On the other hand, it is not appropriate for the children to have to leave their coats and lunch boxes in a pile in the hall and wander around the school gym while the staff figure out what to do that day. The children should have access to a variety of planned activities in a program with knowledgeable staff and an acceptable level of equipment and supplies. This was not always the case in the programs observed in this study.

This section should not close without a comment on the role of the school bus. For the model, full-day rather than half-day kindergarten was an option selected for a variety of reasons. These included increased exposure to education programs of good and consistent quality and the need to provide early childhood education programs in provinces with dispersed populations where children have long daily bus rides. If a 4- or 5-year-old is going to be on a school bus for an hour and a half a day, better that they have an interval of five hours than two between the parts of the round trip.

The use of school buses has an impact on the use of child care programs for kindergarteners. Although parents have the option of driving to the school to deliver or pick up their children, this is less convenient than having the bus collect and drop a child off close to home. In addition, time on the bus is time not required for child care. Although it would be difficult to find many who would call this 'quality time,' it may be that parents are able to arrange work schedules to meet the school bus in the late afternoon. It also may mean that children get off the bus and spend some time at home alone before parents arrive.

If we are concerned about the nature of the after-school time for young children, this concern should extend to rural as well as urban children. We recommend that school boards investigate whether children on the buses are safe and secure once they arrive home. School boards should consult parents to test the level of parent concern on the matter and, if there is concern, implement measures like varied busing schedules to allow rural children, where parents wish it, to use after-school program sites. An alternative solution might be small satellite programs in scattered communities. Buses could leave children at the programs. Although parents would have to drive to pick up their children, the satellite programs would be closer to home than the schools.

Trends in program content

Observers using the ECERS rated programs on a total of 37 items contained in seven subscales. The items in the ECERS combine to provide a detailed picture of program activities. The subscales allowed us to chart trends and directions observed in the study programs and also to talk about similarities and differences in programs. This discussion of trends and directions will focus on the full complement of programs in the study.

The ECERS items were contained in subscales titled:

- personal care routines (e.g., greeting/departing, meals, washroom routines)
- furnishings and display for children (e.g., tables, chairs, storage, furniture for learning activities and relaxation)
- language and reasoning experiences (e.g., understanding language, using language, using learning concepts)
- fine and gross motor activities (e.g., materials and supervision)
- creative activities (e.g., materials and supervision for art, music)
- social development (e.g., free play, group time)
- adult needs (e.g., adult meeting area, professional development, provisions for parents).

The items covered programs in detail and allowed observers to score aspects such as physical space, routines, range of activities, tone of program, adult-child interaction, and levels of safety and supervision. The Early Years Project observations gave us an interesting picture of the trends and directions in the early childhood education programs observed as part of the study. All mean scores were out of a total of 7. A score of 1 on an item was considered inadequate, 3 was considered minimal, 5 was good and 7 was excellent.

The most identifiable and consistent trends from the Early Years Project observations were:

- The scores in the kindergarten and child care programs were similar in the areas of creative activities and social development. These scores tended to be low for both types of programs.
- There were significant differences between the kindergarten and child care scores in the areas of gross motor activities, language and reasoning, and adult needs.

Neither child care nor the kindergarten programs in the study did well in the areas of creative activities (childeare: 4.3; kindergarten: 4.3) and social development (child care: 4.2; kindergarten: 4.0). A very few programs actually excelled in the creative activities subscale (e.g., art, music/movement, blocks, sand/water, dramatic play, creative schedule and creative supervision). However,

there is no single area within the subscale where all programs did poorly. The reasons varied by province and program.

The situation was somewhat different where social development is concerned. This was the lowest scoring subscale for both types of programs. The scores were due to poor ratings for two items: cultural awareness (covering both materials and staff behaviour) and space to be alone. While deficiencies in the latter do not indicate major program problems, low scores in the former are alarming in our multicultural, multiracial Canadian society. The most common score was 3 out of 7. Our diversity has yet to be reflected in the early childhood education programs in the study.

Child care programs outscored kindergartens in the fine and gross motor activities subscale. This difference was due to the lower scores in the gross motor items in the observed kindergarten classrooms, which tended to a slightly greater emphasis on fine motor activities.

The gross motor activity scores, with the lowest mean of 3 in the Québec kindergartens, was of particular concern. Unlike licensed child care, kindergartens do not have a regulation to guide staff in scheduling daily indoor and outdoor gross motor activities, and kindergartens in most schools must be scheduled for gym time as are the grade classes.

Despite the lack of a representative sample, the consistency of the observed patterns gives us a warning. Ongoing concern is expressed regarding the declining physical fitness of Canadian children. One of the advantages often cited for full-day kindergarten is that teachers have more time to work with the children and can therefore include a greater range of activities in the program. The combination of a full day of school, little gross motor activity and long bus rides might indicate a need for rebalancing this aspect of the kindergarten program.

In most cultures, including ours, the ability to understand and use language effectively is the foundation for intellectual growth. Consensus exists among those working with young children, supported by research in the field, that informal use of language, more formal language activities and the inclusion of language experience across the curriculum are essential to the type of early childhood program that leads to success for students while they are in school and once they graduate.

A large gap exists between the kindergarten (5.3) and child care (4.0) scores in the language and reasoning section of the observation. This subscale of the ECERS rates programs on four items: understanding language (receptive), using language (expressive), reasoning (using learning concepts) and informal language. The items cover a range of activities, materials and staff behaviour.

On the whole, the observed programs scored acceptably. However, as stated, there was a significant gap between the kindergarten and child care scores. This gap was due largely to the very low scores in the New Brunswick (2.7) and Québec (3.5) child care programs. These scores were of concern, but were offset by the higher scores in the kindergartens observed in the two provinces (both have a mean score of 5). One interesting finding in the language and reasoning area was that programs in both sectors were more likely to score higher on the using and understanding language items and slightly lower in the reasoning (which may take more staff thought and direction) and informal use of language items.

The final area showing a gap in score was the adult needs subscale. This subscale measures items like the availability of a staff room, an adult meeting area, a staff library, professional development opportunities and provisions that allow parents to participate. Kindergartens have the advantage of school staff rooms and other meeting areas, and child care centres located in schools were more likely to score higher in this area. This particular aspect speaks to the placement of kindergartens within a system where public workplace standards exist rather than the more haphazard development of child care where centres have tended to start up in whatever space happens to be available.

what does combining data tell us?

The Early Years Project was designed to allow us to combine data from various sources so that we could expand our findings. We asked key informants and practitioners about program goals to see if the goals expressed by government and community key informants were shared on the front lines and reflected in programs. These informants often provided government or organization documents to support their verbal responses. We asked practitioners about their program priorities, again to see if their responses coincided with what happens day-to-day.

Perhaps our most rigorous strategy in this regard was the way in which the surveys for parents, teachers and child care staff were organized. In addition to questions specific to the situation of being a parent, teacher or child care staff, we probed program priorities with all three groups using items in the ECERS. Fifteen of the 20 program items that the respondents were asked to rate for importance on a scale of ten in the survey were ECERS items. In this way, we can compare preferences both among the three groups and with the observation data to see if practitioners carried out their own program objectives and those of parents.

Table 9 contains the top ten program items identified in the survey as priorities by parents, teachers and child care staff. For interest, we have added the last two items, 'learning to read' and 'learning to write' in the order in which they were ranked in the survey results: 19 and 20 out of 20.

The scores, as a whole, indicated a consensus among the three groups that socialization and language skills are of highest priority. Parents put a slightly higher emphasis on language than did practitioners. The more academic activities were seen as the least important for children of kindergarten age by all of the three groups.

The other activities listed, particularly by the two practitioner groups, reflected the different early childhood education orientations of child care and kindergarten. For example, 'group time' did not appear in the top ten child care staff priorities, nor did either 'free play' or 'space to be alone' appear on the teachers' list. Child care program organization tends to focus more on the individual and less on group activities. This was the main area where staff activities varied with program goals.

The inclusion of 'blocks and other math activities' and 'sand/water and other science activities' on the teachers' list supported the general contention discussed in other sections of the report that kindergarten, although in many ways similar to child care, was perceived to be 'more academic.'

Table 9
Top Ten Priority Objectives

Parents	Teachers	Child Care Staff
cooperating/sharing with other children 9.30	cooperating/sharing with other children 9.59	cooperating/sharing with other children 9.23
understanding language 9.28	making friends with other children 9.55	making friends with other children 9.19
using language 9.23	understanding language 9.28	using language 9.02
making friends with other children 9.13	blocks and other math activities 9.24	creative activities 9.00
getting along with adults 8.75	using language 9.22	free play 8.97
gross motor physical activities 8.65	group time 9.00	understanding language 8.94
creative activities 8.58	sand/water and other science activities 8.98	getting along with adults 8.93
group time 8.44	getting along with adults 8.98	space to be alone 8.92
fine motor physical activities 8.40	creative activities 8.86	gross motor physical activities 8.85
reasoning/problem-solving 8.27	gross motor physical activities 8.81	dramatic play 8.60
learning to write 6.67 (19)	learning to write 6.67 (19)	learning to read 6.03 (19)
learning to read 6.52 (20)	learning to read 5.34 (20)	learning to write 6.00 (20)

Do the priorities on the lists reflect early childhood practice as observed in the programs? Parents were more likely to find their priority for language reflected in kindergartens consistent with both the ECERS scores and teacher priority. In other areas, priority rankings in the survey did not match practice in the programs observed. For example, neither child care programs nor kindergartens had high ECERS ratings on the creative activities subscale. However, creative activities appeared among the top ten priorities of both child care staff and teachers and, in the former case, were ranked number four. Teachers ranked 'blocks and other math activities' as fourth in priority and 'sand/water and other science activities' as seventh. Kindergarten ECERS ratings for blocks (4.6) and sand/water (3.7) did not reflect the strong showing for these items in the priority rankings.

Discussion of the presence of social activity and direction in the Early Years Project early childhood programs is a little more complicated. The priority expressed by parents and practitioners in this regard was not really reflected in the ECERS itself. It is unfortunate that the scale does not contain ways of rating program strategies that encourage cooperation and sharing activities as well as getting along with other children and adults.

The best that we can do in this regard is to look at the item called 'tone,' which rates the atmosphere in the program ('calm but busy'), mutual respect between adults and children, and the adult behaviours that promote social harmony. Both the kindergartens and child care programs in the study do well on this item. Each sector has an average score of just over 5 out of 7.

As stated previously, one of the items in the social development subscale, 'cultural awareness,' received very low rankings in the observations. The low score was reflected in equally low rankings on all three priority lists. Parents ranked this item 17 out of 20, teachers gave it a ranking of 18 and child care staff put it at 13. This is one area where consensus was not good news.

The last piece of the discussion regarding programs explored whether the early childhood program goals described by key informants were in accord with those expressed by practitioners and parents and whether they were reflected in the programs themselves.

All key informants agreed with parents and practitioners on the importance of the socialization advantages of early childhood education programs. This priority also was expressed in government documents pertaining to programs, most of which come out of education and are intended to support kindergarten.

In addition, while many informants from both sectors described program goals as having to do with all aspects of child development, key informants from education departments or organizations were more likely to talk about school readiness as a goal. This was in accord with the opinion expressed in surveys and focus groups that kindergarten is 'more academic' than child care. This opinion mirrored program differences such as greater use of group time in kindergartens which, in turn, was reflected in differences in practitioner activities.

In many instances, the informants expressed this opinion more strongly than did their provincial documents, although in Alberta the goal of school readiness was quite clear in documents outlining education outcomes for kindergarten students. Interestingly, the Alberta focus group was the only instance where parents expressed some concern that kindergarten was too academic.

In summary, acknowledging the limitations of exploratory research using a small, nonrepresentative sample, the programs observed as a part of Early Years Project were, on average, good-quality early childhood education settings based on the development of the whole child. Specific concerns were the low scores of the child care programs observed in New Brunswick and Québec, the weak showings of both sectors in the areas of creative activities and cultural diversity, the lack of gross motor activities in the Québec kindergartens, the large gap between child care and kindergarten in language activities, and the need to pay more attention to reasoning activities and depth of informal language overall.

There was strong consensus that areas within the realm of socialization are the most important aspects of an early childhood education program, although kindergarten was seen as 'more academic' than child care. This consensus was apparent in the programs and staff activities in aspects such as a greater emphasis on group activities in kindergarten. Although the program goals and priorities expressed in surveys, key informant interviews and focus groups were reflected in the programs themselves, the practice in the observed programs was not always as strong on some items (e.g., creative activities) as the ranking might indicate.

Among the study communities in the four provinces, the quality was more consistent in kindergarten. The programs in the study with the lowest observation scores were the child care programs in the provinces that do not require trained staff. Practitioner education and training stood out as contributing to higher-quality programs and appeared to be the area where legislation had the greatest impact.

Views of Policy-Makers

Key informants were drawn from a total of four levels of government (28 interviews) and corresponding nongovernmental organizations (18 interviews). In each province, we interviewed senior staff of the ministries or departments dealing with education and child care, municipal staff where applicable, and school board staff and trustees. In one province, a member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) agreed to be interviewed.

The nongovernmental organization informants consisted of representatives of professional and advocacy organizations involved in early childhood education either in schools or child care, provincial teachers' organizations and a few academics.

Interviews ran from 40 to 60 minutes and were organized around a semi-structured questionnaire that contained a variety of factual and opinion questions. In all but one instance, we were given permission to tape the interview. The tapes were used in analysis to clear up ambiguities in the written account.

The key informant interviews had a number of objectives:

- to see if there is agreement on goals of early childhood education among the key informants and whether they agree with parents and practitioners and the results of the observations (this is covered in the section which describes the level of agreement between stated goals for early childhood education and the results of the program observations)
- to provide key informant data on changes in early childhood education in each province and the impact of such changes
- to detail the nature and extent of coordination between kindergarten and child care from the perspective of key informants

- to extend project data on perceived similarities and differences between the two early childhood sectors
- to test opinion on a model of an integrated early childhood education program for kindergarten-age children and obtain views on potential opportunities and barriers to implementation
- to obtain views on the appropriate jurisdiction to oversee such a program and test willingness to collaborate with other levels of government.

views on the proposed integrated model

Key informants were asked to respond to a model of an integrated program – the same question put to parents and practitioners. (See page 16 for the description of the model.) They then were asked to describe the implications of the model for children, families, teachers, child care staff, taxpayers, government, and program organization and content.

The interviews revealed an interesting consensus on the integrated program model. Unlike practitioners, but more in agreement with parents, a large majority of the key informants agreed that a program of this nature would be good for children and families.

When describing the benefits for children, key informants used such phrases as “would end duplication,” “would mean less disruption,” “Europe is ahead of us” and “children will be dealing with the same expectations.” Doubts expressed took directions such as “it could be a long day” and “we should be careful to meet the needs of every child.” These responses, while a distinct minority, are legitimate implementation concerns, and even the provincial staff who described the model as “not the wave of the future” agreed that it would benefit children.

Respondents described the model as “convenient” for families. The phrase “one-stop shopping” occurred often. Key informants also talked about the model as helping with transportation problems. Some, particularly in Québec, felt that it would encourage parents to be more active in schools. Concerns were expressed about the need to provide parents with choice. Some respondents worried that parents of children from other age groups, as well as other taxpayers, might feel disadvantaged and resist the idea of public funding to support a program just for kindergarteners. One respondent noted that if funding were not adequate, fees for the extended portion of the day might limit access for low-income families.

Responses on other impacts were more varied. The optimistic respondents believed that an integrated model would result in increased staff cooperation – that “staff would learn from each other” and provide mutual support. Key informants also stated that the model would give teachers more support and raise the status of child care staff.

Others felt that the coordinated model could increase tension between the two professions. In particular, there was concern that teachers would be threatened by the implementation of an early childhood team. A few respondents warned that positions and job descriptions needed to be clearly

spelled out if the team approach were to work. Interestingly, except for Québec, of all the key informants, teacher association representatives were the least enthusiastic about the model.

A few respondents advised that it was not necessary for everyone in an integrated program to have degrees (although this was not a part of the model) and were concerned about the expense of bringing all staff up to that level. Some worried that child care staff would end up as 'subservient' in the team. In the end, one respondent summed up the situation when he stated the obvious: "You have to decide what you want to do, have the best people to do this and pay them well."

Nongovernmental organization key informants were asked whether they supported crossover courses "so that kindergarten teachers and child care staff could have access to training and credentials in both fields." All respondents supported the idea. (Such training exists in Alberta and Québec.) Two of the New Brunswick respondents stated that increased training for child care staff was a prerequisite for a successful integrated model.

Impacts on taxpayers and government often were described in similar terms. They dealt with concern about resources ("The funds will have to come from somewhere") and often appeared as messages that respondents felt would generate public support. One respondent summed up a number of thoughts expressed by others when she stated that it was government's job to convince taxpayers that funds spent up-front for early childhood education paid dividends in the long run.

A number of other responses on the subject of taxpayer or government impacts provide information on possible public messages, including improvement of school readiness and better use of existing resources. This response sometimes referred to specifics, such as shared use of facilities. Integrated use of classrooms and playgrounds was recognized by many as a publicly visible example of ending duplication. In other instances, the idea of using what we already have in better ways referred to finances. One municipal respondent echoed others when she stated: "We've been wasting funds running two systems."

Many key informants felt that an integrated program might save costs, although a few understood that in the two provinces which would have to 'ramp up' to provide at least full-day kindergarten as a universal part of the package (Ontario and Alberta), the initial costs would be considerable. Only one respondent stipulated that the initiative would have to be expenditure-neutral.

Specific to government, a strong desire that different ministries, departments and/or levels work together to implement integration was, in a few instances, balanced by a concern that an initiative of this nature would increase bureaucracy. In fact, key informants, particularly in New Brunswick and Alberta, stressed the need to improve government infrastructure if new program models were on the way. A Québec respondent stated that government needed a long-term vision and that decentralization required a national framework. Québec informants were most likely to be concerned that government ensure equal access for all children.

When asked where in government an integrated model should reside, key informants gave mixed responses. The fact that they were most likely to put the program under education may be due to the number of informants (21 out of 46) either directly in or related to that sector. This may have

happened because, in each community, we interviewed representatives at two education levels, provincial and local.

Nonetheless, informants from other sectors also identified education as the appropriate location for an integrated program and education informants did not always express a preference for their own sector. The attraction is education's ability to provide for all children. The second most popular choice was some kind of joint effort, like an interdepartmental initiative or a Ministry of the Child. Québec and Alberta respondents were more likely to prioritize a high degree of both local government and parent/community participation.

We asked key informants to identify opportunities for and barriers to implementation. Almost every factor that was mentioned as an opportunity was also, at some point, described as a barrier. Opinion ranged from "I can't see any barriers" to the view that everything, including school janitorial staff, were barriers. At times, a key informant gave the same answer to both parts of the question.

The players identified as able to make or break an integrated program were, in order of frequency, governments at all levels (combined frequency), practitioners, school principals and parents. 'Territorial' and 'turf' were words often used to describe barriers from the professions. Provincial and local government were more likely to be identified as implementers. Where the federal level was identified, it was seen to have a role in providing an appropriate central contact and funding.

Specific items that were noted as opportunities included government cutbacks, the notion of doing something important for kids and the existence of local initiatives on which to build. Barriers included rules and rigidity, space limitations, lack of people with expertise to implement an integrated model and the problem of having at least two departments deal with the same age children.

Government key informants were asked: "Are there circumstances under which you would be prepared to sit down and discuss the implementation of a coordinated early childhood education and child care model with other levels of government?" All said that they were prepared to do so under a variety of circumstances – e.g., if the other level or levels were willing to work together, had a vision or were prepared to contribute resources.

Finally, we asked key informants about the implications of an integrated model for kindergarten and child care programs. On the whole, respondents were open-minded, like the Ontario school trustee who stated: "It takes what works and is practical." Again, many of those interviewed stated that an integrated program would increase cooperation and provide more program continuity. This view was tempered slightly by a concern that teamwork would increase staff workload. Although there were some concerns about sufficient space and scheduling difficulties, there was overall support among key informants for sharing facilities. A faculty of education professor provided fair warning that "Practically, this is very complex."

In one province, when asked about the model's implications for program, two informants from nongovernmental organizations at the same meeting answered simultaneously: "more time for play" (child care representative) and "more time for learning" (education representative). This incident is indicative of the different program approaches to the model.

Bearing in mind that respondents from both sectors articulated socialization and learning through play as goals, education representatives were more likely to attribute school readiness advantages to a full-day, integrated model. Child care representatives were more likely to talk in terms of holistic models. However, representatives of the two sectors were not unanimous in these views. One education informant expressed the hope that an integrated model would encourage teachers to expand their view beyond that of academic achievement. Another warned that the academic parts of the program should not be allowed to take over the whole day.

Key informants

In addition to asking key informants about the hypothetical integrated model, we gathered data on various aspects of the current early childhood education and care situation in each province. We asked about how the changes in kindergarten and child care had affected different program elements, the extent of current kindergarten/child care coordination efforts in each province, and key informants' views on the similarities and differences in the two sectors.

impact of change

When we inquired about the impact of changes in early childhood care and education, we asked how these had affected the programs in the respondent's jurisdiction as well as the programs in the other major jurisdiction dealing with kindergarten-age children. In other words, how do changes in kindergarten affect child care and vice versa? Most of the time, there was little knowledge of cross-jurisdictional effects.

New Brunswick

The New Brunswick kindergarten initiative means that 6,500 5-year-olds now attend a publicly-funded early childhood education program on a full-day basis. The way in which in-service upgrading for the first group of kindergarten teachers was implemented has meant that, for at least the first eight years of the program, kindergartens are staffed by well-trained and educated teachers who, unlike many kindergarten teachers in other parts of the country, have taken courses specific to the education of young children. An unspecified but, according to informants, small number of the pre-existing private kindergarten teachers were not hired in the new programs. Indications are that either their programs no longer operate or that the teachers now teach younger children. Unlike practitioners, key informants were uncritical of the eight-year phase-in to full salary.

According to a study carried out in 1995 by the Ad Hoc Committee on Child Care, the child care sector lost 19 percent of its enrollment after public kindergartens opened. However, key informants involved in child care were not, by and large, critical of the kindergarten initiative.

Québec

The implementation of the new early childhood policy seems to have proceeded well where kindergarteners are concerned, especially considering the magnitude of the initiative. Ninety-eight percent of 5-year-olds now attend full-day kindergarten. Between September and December of 1997, 80 new after-school programs were started.

Initially, there was a great deal of concern because the extension of kindergarten hours meant that children and, therefore, child care staff had fewer hours in child care. Staff were concerned about lower pay, de-skilling and lowered professional status. This concern has diminished a great deal since the \$5-a-day maximum child care fee for 4-year-olds has resulted in a huge expansion (much more than originally anticipated) in the licensed sector in services for that age group. Child care staff who formerly worked with 5-year-olds have moved into those programs. The demand for school-based child care for 5-year-olds likely will increase in the fall of 1998 when the \$5-a-day per child maximum fee begins for this age group.

Ontario

In Ontario, key informants reported that the changes in both Junior Kindergarten (JK) and child care have combined to decrease the availability of early childhood education for kindergarten-age children. The move of JK from mandatory to optional provision resulted in the loss of more than 20,000 half-day spaces. The withdrawal of provincial capital funding for both junior kindergarten and child care means that expansion of early childhood education programs into new areas is at a standstill.

In Ottawa, while the situation in the Ottawa Roman Catholic Separate School Board (one of our project sites) is stable, the changes in its public counterpart, the Ottawa Board of Education, have created unease. Amalgamation with the Carleton Board of Education has taken an immense toll on all of the public board's resources.

Not only is any amalgamation of this size difficult, but there are also program differences between the two boards, JK being one of them. The pilot projects described in the provincial profile are an attempt to make JK less of an issue in amalgamation, but they infuriate the teachers' federations.

In addition, the Ottawa Board of Education has, in the run-up to reorganization, cut funding in a variety of areas including child care. One of the two child care consultant positions was eliminated and child care centres will have to start paying rent to the school board – a move that will end up increasing costs to parents. There is great concern that child care centres will come to be seen as merely tenants rather than partners in the school.

Key informants are pessimistic about the prospects of continuing the resource-sharing that both schools and child care centres have come to value. Informants note a decline in school board

support for school/child care coordination. The combination of board amalgamation, budget cuts and the pilots has negatively affected the provision of early childhood education and care in Ottawa as well as the relationship between the kindergarten and child care early childhood sectors.

Alberta

Virtually all key informants reported that the provincial government's decisions regarding kindergarten created enormous confusion in the short term and weakened the program altogether. The 1993 decision to cut kindergarten hours by 50 percent to 200 hours a year has had a number of effects:

- Parents who wished a full year of kindergarten for their children were expected to pay fees for half of that time.
- Communities, school boards and teachers were left to cope with situations where, after the first five months of school, the children from families that could afford the fees continued to attend kindergarten, minus their friends from lower-income families. Some teachers, upset at the prospect of having to explain the absences to the class, successfully requested that school boards close programs for a week at mid-point in the hope of making the children leaving the program less conspicuous.
- Kindergarten teachers with seniority left kindergartens for the grade classes.
- Not recognizing how vulnerable all teachers were in the circumstances, some individual grade class teachers in schools continued to see their kindergarten colleagues as marginal and a legitimate target for cuts.
- Unfortunately for the provincial government, its actions resulted in the formation of a coalition of teachers, parents from all social classes and education professionals to fight for kindergarten.
- The Edmonton School Board refused to cut kindergarten hours and supplemented the costs with local funds. A parent of a special needs child sued on the grounds that the funds were being taken out of special education and that this solution for kindergarten affected his child. The school board won the case, but endured some uneasy moments.

The situation improved somewhat when the province reinstated kindergarten funding to cover 400 hours a year per child. The Edmonton School Board supplements the funding to provide 448 hours. However, this still does not amount to a complete half day and continues to have an effect on the teaching workforce because even a teacher working morning and afternoon can never have what amounts to a full-time position.

Salary, benefits and pensions have been affected. Kindergarten has, in many instances, become an entry point for new teachers cycling through on their way to full-time jobs in the grade

classrooms. Alberta has diminished its stable kindergarten teaching cohort, many of whom had teaching degrees with an early childhood specialty.

In all four study provinces, key informants provided detailed information on the effects of change on early childhood education programs, both kindergarten and child care. Effects that were perceived as negative (Ontario, Alberta) usually were described in more detail than those perceived as positive (New Brunswick, Québec). While informants were aware of how changes in either their own jurisdiction or their partner jurisdiction affected them, they were unaware of how changes in their jurisdiction affected their partner.

Kindergarten/child care coordination

We asked key informants to describe the types and extent of coordination between kindergarten and child care. Government informants were most likely to describe formal examples of coordination. However, the examples often had less to do with mainstream programs like schools and child care centres and more with programs for children with special needs. None of the provincial governments currently encourages kindergarten/child care coordination through concrete messages, guidelines or directives.

Informants from nongovernmental organizations were less encouraged than their government partners and often were unaware of the coordination activities reported by government representatives. All informants stated that coordination took place in individual circumstances when a school principal took the initiative.

With the exception of Ontario, the formal coordination initiatives that build bridges between child care and kindergarten are recent. In New Brunswick, a child care representative sits on the provincial kindergarten curriculum committee. Québec has coordinating committees with members from both jurisdictions to help implement change. In addition, one of the Québec school boards that we studied has a child care consultant, shares resources with child care and provides joint professional development for teachers and child care staff. Informants in Québec predicted that the new school councils would strengthen this direction.

In Ontario, senior staff from the three ministries of Education and Training, Community and Social Services, and Recreation meet during the year and activities of the three are coordinated through local government offices. Ontario now has an Office for Integrated Children's Services, located in the Ministry of Health, under the aegis of a Minister Without Portfolio and directed by an Assistant Deputy Minister. Thirteen hundred child care programs in Ontario are located in schools.

School board and community key informants were not encouraging about the real nature and extent of coordination in Ontario. They pointed out that the provincial government had stopped building child care space into every new school. In addition, as in Ottawa, provincially-mandated school board reorganization, along with changes in education funding and lack of provincial leadership in early childhood education, were described as having diminished the support that many school boards once offered the child care centres located in their schools.

Professional and community organizations in Ontario and Alberta are the most likely of any of the nongovernmental organizations to report specific coordination activities. The Alberta Teachers Association has funded local initiatives. The Ontario Teachers Federation is a longstanding member of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care.

Coordination activities exist but, except for Québec where they are part of a major initiative, do not loom large on provincial or school board agendas. We believe the activities are worth strengthening. Not only do kindergarten and child care combined deal with virtually every 5-year-old and many of the 4-year-olds in the provinces, they often deal with the same children, as we pointed out previously. In Ontario, with a large population and a recent past record of expansion of early childhood education, 22,000 4- and 5-year-olds attend both child care and kindergarten. Even in the smaller province of Alberta, the number is 8,400. In Québec, more than 30 percent of the kindergarten population of 90,000 is enrolled in school-based child care. In addition, key informants themselves pointed out the benefits, both concrete and in terms of public perception, of sharing resources.

In order to get a sense of potential for an integrated model, we asked key informants where they believed that their jurisdiction or organization would place itself on the following scale of coordination:

- total separation between kindergarten and child care programs
- split provision with greater communication between child care staff and kindergarten teachers (enhanced status quo)
- stronger program coordination (e.g., split provision with coordinating initiatives such as joint professional development, sharing of records regarding children's progress, joint reporting to parents, cooperative program planning)
- full program integration.

Two informants, one government and one nongovernmental, put their organizations at level 1 on the scale of coordination. Five government informants reported that their jurisdictions were between levels 2 and 3 on the scale of coordination, two were between 3 and 4, and two were at level 4. One who reported between levels 2 and 3 identified level 4 as the ultimate objective. Another reported a personal preference for level 4. In most cases, representatives of the same government were consistent in their answers.

Overall, nongovernmental organization representatives reported more comfort with higher levels of coordination than did government representatives. Three informants reported that their organization was at level 3, one reported between levels 3 and 4, and six were at level 4. However, five of these were from Ontario, which has had a past emphasis on coordination.

Other than the nongovernmental organizations at level 4, there is no consistent provincial breakdown. However, the number of key informants who placed their jurisdiction or organization

between levels 2 and 3 indicates that there has been some movement towards coordination, even without official direction. In addition, getting to level 3 often was seen as a prerequisite for getting to level 4. Although we have used the levels that officially were reported, many who reported below level 4 described that level as desirable in their opinion. In theory, at any rate, there appears to be a willingness to accommodate new models.

similarities and differences

Key informants were asked open-ended questions regarding their views on the similarities and differences in the program objectives and program characteristics in kindergarten and child care. The questions were the same as those asked in the practitioner interviews and less detailed than those asked in the survey.

Nevertheless, the same broad finding emerged. Kindergartens were described, almost unanimously, as more structured, operating under education guidelines (in Alberta's case, outcomes) and concentrating more on school readiness. Other differences included the smaller group sizes and staff-child ratios in child care and what was perceived to be a better educated workforce in kindergarten.

Many informants stressed the similarities in program objectives and characteristics. They noted that the programs dealt with the same age group, were based on child development, and emphasized socialization and learning through play. Interestingly, a number of Québec informants described preschool child care in that province (not a part of the study) as more 'scolarisant' than kindergarten. Another described kindergarten as based on 'play for learning' and after-school child care as 'play for relaxation.'

To conclude, there was a high level of agreement among key informants that an early childhood education program which integrated kindergarten and child care would be good for children and helpful to families. The key informants were somewhat more conservative than parents but more open-minded than practitioners on this topic. Informants were realistic about the opportunities and barriers to implementation. Resources – the absolute level and whether funds would be taken from existing programs to fund something new – were a concern.

When asked where such a program should reside in government, respondents preferred either the provincial Education Ministries or a Ministry of the Child. Local implementation with provincial overview was either stated or implied as a preferred option. There was at least theoretical willingness to embark on discussions with other government and nongovernmental organization players.

Informants described impacts of changes in early childhood education programs in their own sector, but were unable to describe how the changes in their sector affected their partner.

At this time, no provincial government explicitly encourages school/child care coordination through official documents or other communications strategies, although Ontario government staff stated that ministries expect service coordination to take place through local offices. Two of the study school boards, one in Ontario and one in Québec, have coordination policies and activities. The

Ontario respondents were not optimistic about future progress. Everyone stated that coordination takes place in individual schools with sympathetic principals.

Key informants agreed with parents and practitioners on the similarities and differences between kindergarten and child care. Both are based on child development and learning through play; kindergarten is perceived as being 'more academic.'

Future Models and Recommendations

The Early Years Project investigated early childhood education and care in provinces where policies and programs had undergone change. Our method generated both quantitative and qualitative data that enabled us to describe and analyze the current situation as well as possibilities for future models.

When considering proposals for future types of programs, it is a good idea to proceed in light of criteria that provide a foundation for quality, cost-effectiveness and public acceptability. Striking a balance that includes all of these elements is important for both practical and political purposes.

In addition, interpreting the Early Years Project results in ways that generate proposals for new models gave us a great deal of flexibility as to the extent of change that we are able to recommend. Just as we asked interview respondents where on a continuum of coordination they felt most comfortable, we are able to discuss both program coordination and integration.

A discussion of program quality based on Early Years Project findings could be based on who should work in programs, where programs should take place and what they should contain.

Although the importance of staff-child ratios and group size has been well documented in a longstanding and substantial body of research and cannot be discounted, our research indicates that the education background of staff can compensate for larger groups and more children per staff. This finding is based on the higher ECERS scores in kindergartens, which have larger groups and fewer but better-trained staff than child care. The element most likely to ensure quality in programs is the presence of trained staff, and our data indicate that length and level of training make a difference. Kindergarten teachers, all of whom have degrees, are more likely to deliver quality early childhood education. Moreover, the similarity of teaching qualifications across provinces means that quality is more consistent in kindergartens.

This finding in no way implies that child care staff should exit early childhood education programs for kindergarteners. It does mean, however, that those working with young children should have training appropriate to the age group with which they are working and the goals of the program in which they are employed. In New Brunswick and Québec, lack of regulation regarding trained staff in child care means that these criteria may not be met. Our data showed that program quality for this age group was compromised in these two provinces and that child care quality was inconsistent nation-wide. We also found that there was no desire among parents and teachers to have kindergarten teachers replaced by early childhood educators.

Where should future programs be located? A large majority of parents and teachers and a slight majority of child care staff cited a school location as a factor which would make a proposed integrated program more acceptable. Parents, in particular, cited a school location as providing quality assurance factors, such as increased safety. We asked key informants which government department or ministry should house a new type of early childhood program. Most cited the provincial education jurisdiction or a joint effort, such as a Ministry of the Child, as the appropriate spot.

How does the 'what' of early childhood education coincide with quality? Our results showed that quality, in general, will follow from well-trained staff. In addition, the implementation of full-day kindergarten requires that attention be paid to the content and quality of the 'matching' child care provision.

Our preference data helped provide the specifics of program content. Parents and practitioners were quite clear that socialization and the enhancement of language skills were paramount in early childhood programs. They understood the link between the activities in the current programs and later success in the more formal activities (e.g., reading and writing) that children encounter in later grades. Both kindergarten teachers and child care staff must increase their attention to cultural awareness and sensitivity. Creative activities and experimental activities such as sand, blocks and water require more attention.

In summary, the Early Years Project data showed that provision of high-quality early childhood education depends largely on trained staff and that staff with higher levels of training can provide a good program to more children. There is a preference for close ties to education both for program location and jurisdiction. A majority of all three respondent groups agreed on the importance of socialization and language activities for young children. None of the respondent groups supported increased formal activities in areas such as reading and writing.

Financial considerations are an essential part of policy and program development. We gathered data from Ontario, Québec and Alberta and can provide some rough figures on the cost effectiveness of an integrated model.

Ontario and Alberta continue to operate kindergarten and child care programs for kindergarten-age children on two separate funding and jurisdiction tracks, although Ontario has a history of strong coordination between the two programs. Québec has had child care for this age group as a school-based program operated by school boards for more than a decade. While not integrated with kindergarten, it has a strong jurisdictional relationship. The reforms announced in Québec in 1997 strengthen this tie.

Our information shows that progress towards integration, even if it is simply a jurisdictional relationship, does not increase costs and may generate savings. The combined average costs for a child in Québec who attends both full-day kindergarten and child care is \$5,700 a year. This figure is less than the cost for a kindergartner who attends half-day kindergarten plus child care in either of the other two provinces. The average cost in Ontario is \$7,520 and in Alberta is \$5,907.

These costs do not factor program quality into the equation. While we have not employed a rigorous calculation in this regard, the insertion into the mix of further quality elements, such as trained staff and planning time, probably would bring Québec's costs up to the level of Alberta's.

It may be more helpful to consider work done by the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services in 1993. A school-based program model integrating full-day kindergarten for 4- and 5-year-olds with optional extended-day child care generated savings of \$1.12 per day per child based on staff-child ratios of 1:12 throughout the day. Kindergarten teachers and child care staff were to work as a team. Cost efficiencies also were found in the areas of transportation, capital expansion (use of existing school space, capital spending in one system only) and the acquisition of supplies and equipment. While providing all 4- and 5-year-olds in the province with expanded early childhood education would increase overall expenses, such a program costs less per child than the current two-track provision.

How would government implement and talk about an enhanced early childhood program for kindergarteners? What direction is most acceptable to the various publics involved in the study – parents, practitioners and key informants? Based on our findings, governments should proceed – with caution.

First, an enhanced program would be popular with parents. Parent respondents supported increased coordination between kindergarten and child care. Three-quarters said that an integrated program would be beneficial. No parents put value on the current split provision. In addition, a number of factors made an integrated program more favourable to parents. These included tax-supported full-day kindergarten programs, inclusion of 4- and 5-year-olds, a school location, cost-effectiveness, gradual introduction via demonstration sites, links with later grades and fees for out-of-school hours based on a sliding scale. The ability to choose a longer or shorter day was important.

Implementation and communications should take place in ways that meet parents' concerns about possible increased bureaucratization, less choice, more children per staff, less protection for younger children and the replacement of kindergarten teachers with other types of staff.

It will be essential to pay close attention to the anxiety of practitioners. While they were less enthusiastic than parents about an integrated program for kindergarteners, most of the same factors that made the program more favourable to parents work for practitioners. The factors that they liked were gradual introduction, school location, fee based on income for out-of-school hours, links with later grades and cost-effectiveness. The possibility of crossover training was an incentive for child care staff and also would provide a place for the two types of professionals to interact. Involving practitioners in planning would help allay concerns about change descending without advice from those on the front lines.

Key informants, many of whom would implement a new program or would monitor progress as part of professional or advocacy organizations, will want to be assured that increased coordination or integration will be accompanied by sufficient resources.

Increased coordination between programs dealing with the same children simply makes sense. If appropriately implemented, an integrated program would go some steps further than simple coordination and would allow for a program that combines the best features that respondents saw in kindergarten and child care programs. For example, if properly designed, a team approach to staffing could improve the staff-child ratios in kindergarten. Where necessary, such an approach also could improve the qualifications of and provide career ladders for child care staff while preserving the role of the kindergarten teacher and combining the academic and family-oriented approaches that parents value in the two programs.

Combining our data on preferences and factors making program innovations in early childhood more or less acceptable shows support for tax-supported full-day kindergarten programs for 5-year-olds. An adventurous province could include 4-year-olds. Parents, in particular, are interested in extended days and programs in summer which would be supported by fees based on income.

Expanding and improving kindergarten and child care for this age group is a reasonably safe direction for government to pursue as it is less controversial than dealing with programs for younger children (though the latter area also requires attention). Almost all parents look forward to the day when their children start kindergarten. It is seen as the first step into the education system. An initiative in the kindergarten years builds on that optimism, and it would appear that many parents are comfortable with longer school days for young children. Optional extension of hours beyond a full-school day is cost-effective, helpful mainly to families with working parents and, if properly implemented, good for children.

Recommendations

- 1. The federal government should take leadership in establishing a federal/provincial partnership to fund, implement and evaluate demonstration school-based integrated early childhood education programs for kindergarten-age children. New Brunswick, because of its recent experience implementing kindergarten, and Québec, due to its innovative early childhood reform, can provide provincial expertise.**

Key informants said clearly that they were prepared to work with all levels of government and other groups to implement innovations in early childhood education. In addition, key informants were more likely to prefer education as a home for a new program and parents were clear that they wished to see early childhood education located in schools. Although the federal government has no jurisdiction in elementary education, its presence is desirable and even necessary to work with the provinces to ensure consistency from province to province and to provide some financial resources.

Such programs should combine funding (some current, some new) from all three levels of government. Implementation would be provincial/local with school boards or districts as the local lead. At the provincial level, implementation and administration should be the responsibility of either an interministerial body or the education department. The emphasis should be on integrating the parts of a child's day and away from dividing the day into school and child care sections.

While flexibility in meeting local needs is essential in communities and important for evaluation purposes, the federal government should negotiate criteria for funding that would ensure high quality, cost effectiveness and equity in learning. The Early Years Project findings indicate that the program should be built around a full-day kindergarten program with improved staff-child ratios. All staff should be trained and should work as a team. Since it does not make sense for members of a team to work for different employers, school boards or districts would take that responsibility. Although there is a good deal of room for differentiated staffing models and innovations with new, specialized qualifications, kindergarten teachers should play a major role on the staff team and should not be replaced by staff with less training. Demonstration models should build in career ladders for child care staff.

Affordability is a major issue for early childhood programs. Parents recognize this when they favour a tax-supported, full-day kindergarten and fees based on income for the parts of the program that would take place outside standard school hours.

Gradual implementation should be accompanied by advice from parents, professionals and communities as the programs progress. Rather than a follow-up research project to extend the Early Years Project, the next pieces of research should be the on-the-ground evaluations for the demonstration projects themselves.

- 2. Local and provincial jurisdictions should be responsible for curriculum and programs should continue to address the needs of young children, and respect the wishes of parents and practitioners regarding the content of early childhood education programs.**

All groups of respondents, whether parents or practitioners, made it very clear that they supported the child-centred approach in current early childhood education practice and had no desire for increased formality in programs.

- 3. Regardless of new models, provincial and local jurisdictions with responsibility for education and child care should take steps to encourage communication and coordination between kindergarten and child care programs, especially those that 'share' children.**

The Early Years Project found that school/child care coordination is unlikely to occur without leadership from the governments that administer the programs. Although the important activities are going to happen in neighbourhood schools and child care programs among parents and professionals, the activities are more likely to take place if the provincial departments and ministries provide encouragement, specific suggestions and, in some cases, resources. The basis for such direction is, of course, children's well-being. It may seem simplistic to suggest that all of the professionals dealing with a child talk to each other and to the parents, but the Early Years Project encountered instances where teachers and child care staff who worked down the hall from each other would say during an interview: "I really should walk over and observe the (kindergarten or child care) program some day."

4. **Provincial and local jurisdictions should recognize that early childhood education programs require a minimum number of trained staff to ensure quality and make the necessary regulatory and funding changes. Further, they should cooperate in providing 'crossover' in-service training in early childhood education at levels appropriate to both teachers and child care staff.**

Our interviews pointed to very different cultures in the two types of early childhood education programs. While this difference need not necessarily be problematic, we found that in the four study provinces each professional group uses its own culture as proof of its superiority. This is a significant barrier to cooperation. In addition, parents participating in the Early Years Project were clear in their desire that those working with young children have particular training and education with the appropriate age group.

5. **The jurisdictions should cooperate in providing 'crossover' in-service training in early childhood education at levels appropriate to both teachers and child care staff.**

Crossover training can serve a number of purposes. At its most basic, it can be a place where professionals can familiarize themselves with their partners in early childhood education. At a higher level, it can be designed to provide additional qualifications for teachers and provide non-degree child care staff with credits towards a degree. At its most innovative, crossover training could create a new cohort of staff trained at various levels and with new qualifications to work in or administer an integrated program.

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Appendix

Early Years Project: Research Methods

1.0. research methods: overview of multiple method approach

This exploratory research project utilized a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods in the context of a community study design. The mix of methods included:

- structured observations in kindergarten and child care classrooms
- surveys of parents of children of kindergarten age
- surveys of practitioners working with that age group
- in-depth personal interviews with key informants
- focus groups with parents of children of kindergarten age.

The study design called for conducting field work in four sampled communities. For purposes of this study, a community was defined as a school board district or its equivalent.

1.1. sample selection

1.1.1. criteria for selection of study communities included the following requirements at the community level

- the experience of recent changes in policies affecting both child care and kindergarten programs
- a mix of urban, suburban and rural populations
- population and programs serving both official language groups.

1.1.2. discussion of selection criteria

The study design focussed on change, examining its consequences and assessing reactions to proposed policy and project changes. This is an era of considerable change in public policy affecting programs for children of kindergarten age in Canada. Virtually all provinces have made changes in child care policies in recent years. Four provinces – New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario and Alberta – also had made recent changes in kindergarten policies and programs. Four communities – one from each of those provinces – were selected as study sites. This sampling design was based on the

assumption that the experience of changes in public policy and service delivery would increase the level of public interest in the questions under study. Media attention to issues around provision of early childhood programs was expected to heighten the salience of these issues for parents and practitioners.

Each site had to include a mix of urban, suburban and rural, and French- and English-speaking populations and programs. This requirement was intended to maximize the applicability to the study findings beyond the boundaries of the sampled communities.

1.1.3. sample communities

Four study communities were selected: Ottawa, Ontario; Fredericton, New Brunswick; Québec City, Québec; and Edmonton, Alberta. A community was defined broadly to include surrounding suburban and rural areas in addition to the downtown urban area. In each of the study communities, the necessary permissions were obtained from local education and child care bodies. Field work was completed in the Ontario and New Brunswick in spring 1997 and in the Alberta and Québec communities in late fall/winter 1997.

1.2. surveys

1.2.1. survey samples

The sampling design called for recruitment of samples of kindergarten teachers, child care staff and parents of kindergarten-age children from each of the sampled school and child care programs in the various study communities. The sample was stratified to ensure representation of English-speaking and French-speaking respondents in all samples. Following approval of the Early Years Project research design from education and early childhood education officials in the study communities, respondents were recruited through letters distributed to parents and practitioners (kindergarten teachers and child care staff) in programs in the study sites. Table A1 describes the breakdown of the study samples. The resulting sample sizes are 275 parents, 49 kindergarten teachers and 73 child care staff.

1.2.2. instruments

Survey research instruments for parents and practitioners were drafted by the study directors and then revised and formatted by the study consultants, Social Data Research. Draft interview schedules were pre-tested and then revised based on pre-test field experience. Copies of the parent and practitioner survey research instruments are available upon request.

1.2.3. survey field methods

Field work was conducted in the four study communities in Ontario, New Brunswick, Alberta and Québec. Parents and practitioners in sampled programs in each of the study sites were invited to participate in the study. In some study sites, the research consultants were given a list of eligible respondents who could be contacted directly and invited to participate in the study. In other locales, the subjects were given an information sheet and consent form to complete and return to the research consultants to indicate their willingness to be interviewed.

Interviewers contacted respondents to request their participation in the study and arrange a time for an interview. Interviews were conducted by telephone. Parent interviews ranged in length from 20 minutes to over one hour and on average took just over a half-hour (35 minutes). Teacher interviews ranged from 25 to 116 minutes, with an average interview time of 40 minutes. Child care staff interviews ranged from 17 to 55 minutes, with a 30 minute average time.

1.2.4. completion rates

Table A2 summarizes the results for completed interviews and response rates based on consent forms received and respondents approached directly.

1.3. key informant interviews

The key informants were drawn from four levels of government (28 interviews) and corresponding nongovernmental organizations (18 interviews). In each province, key informants included senior staff of the ministries or departments dealing with education and child care, municipal staff (where applicable), and school board staff and trustees. In one province, an MLA also was interviewed. Key informants for the study were interviewed using a structured interview schedule (available upon request).

Most of the key informants were based in the study communities. Key informant interviews typically were conducted in person by one of the project co-directors. There were some instances, however, of key informants who were located elsewhere, or who were not available during the research week. In these cases, the interviews were conducted outside the research week, either by telephone or in person although some were conducted by telephone following the field work week. While key informants usually were interviewed individually, there were several instances in which two respondents were interviewed together.

1.4. program observations

The study design involved conducting structured observations in five kindergarten classrooms and five child care centres in each of the study communities. The actual sampling method yielded a total of 40 programs: 19 child care programs and 21 kindergartens. Program content and quality

were measured using the Harms and Clifford Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS), a standardized, structured observation guide that has been used widely in child care and kindergarten programs in Canada and the United States [Harms and Clifford 1980]. This study used the ECERS in both English and French language version. The ECERS rates 37 features of an early childhood program on a seven-point bi-polar scale where 1 = inadequate and 7 = excellent. The scale items are combined into seven subscales which evaluate the following dimensions: personal care routines (e.g., greeting/departing, meals and snacks); furnishings/display; language/reasoning; fine/gross motor activities; creative activities (e.g., art, music, sand and water, dramatic play); social development (e.g., space to be alone, free play, group time); and adult needs (e.g., staff lounge/meeting area, professional development opportunities and provisions for parents). An overall mean score was calculated for each program.

Observers trained in early childhood education were recruited in each of the study communities and were trained in the use of the scale. The project was fortunate in being able to hire a number of experienced child care staff as observers. The co-directors trained the observers in the use of the ECERS. The training sessions incorporated a training video prepared by the authors of the ECERS scale [Harms et al 1992].

The study design called for choosing child care programs located both on and off school premises and for selecting, where these existed, child care and kindergarten programs that had some kind of relationship that could range from formal coordination to at least serving the same children. In one of the study sites, Ottawa, four days prior to the scheduled beginning of the field work and in reaction to staff layoffs in the local school board, the teachers' federations directed that their members not participate in the project. Although observations could proceed as planned in all of the original child care sites, the kindergarten observations were arranged for another local board in the same community that agreed to participate. The goal of observing in 'matched' programs was thus not possible in Ottawa, with the exception of one site, where the project was able to observe an extra child care program located in a school in the substitute board.

Table A1
Study Sample Size by Study Community

	Study Community				
	Ottawa	Fredericton	Edmonton	Québec City	Total
Parents	80	68	60	67	275
Kindergarten Teachers	19	15	8	7	49
Child Care Staff	24	24	14	11	73

Table A2
Results for Completed
Interviews and Response Rates

	Population Estimate	Number of Consent Forms Returned	(%)	Number Interviewed	(%)
Ottawa					
Parents	594	112	18.9	80	71.4
Teachers	39	24*	61.5	19	79.2
Child care staff	33	31	93.9	24	77.4
Fredericton					
Parents	312	84	26.9	68	80.9
Teachers	33	15	45.5	15	100.0
Child care staff	45	24	53.3	24	100.0
Edmonton					
Parents	726	69	9.5	60	87.0
Teachers	31	8	25.8	8	100.0
Child care staff	55	17	30.9	14	82.4
Québec City					
Parents	1,130	70	6.2	67	95.7
Teachers	41	7	17.0	7	100.0
Child care staff	14	12	85.7	11	91.7

* This number includes some teachers from the Ottawa Board who initially responded positively but then were instructed by their union not to participate.

In other study communities, the observations took place as originally planned. However, the co-directors had concerns about the accuracy of one of the sets of observations, based on their own direct observations in this site. In this case, the observations were excluded from the sample, leaving four of each type of program in the analysis in that community.

1.5 practitioner interviews

The practitioners in the observed programs and classrooms – both child care staff and kindergarten teachers – were interviewed in the various study communities. Interviews were conducted in person or over the telephone by the study directors using a structured interview form (available upon request). Practitioner interviews were approximately 45 minutes in duration. The study design called for interviews with five child care staff and five kindergarten teachers in each of the study communi-

ties; the actual total of completed interviews was 39. The practitioner samples were stratified to include practitioners from both French-language and English-language programs. Practitioner interviews were conducted in French or English.

1.6. focus groups

The study design included focus groups with English-speaking and French-speaking parents in each of the study communities. Two groups, one English-speaking and one French-speaking, were convened at all locations except Edmonton. The single Edmonton group was conducted in English. The purpose of the focus groups was to probe parents' preferences, behaviours, attitudes and expectations regarding early childhood education programs for their kindergarten-age children. Seven two-hour focus groups were conducted with a total of 45 parents of 4- and 5-year-old children. Focus groups ranged in size from four to 14 members. Table A3 reports on focus group participation by location, language and gender.

1.6.1. focus group characteristics

Focus group participants ranged in age from early 20s to early 40s. Their educational backgrounds were diverse, as were other socioeconomic attributes, including marital status. Full-time homemakers, professionals, tradespersons, clerical workers, home/office workers and students made up the cross-section of participating parents. Group members included parents who worked full- or part-time in the paid labour force and those staying at home to care for their young children. Excluded from participation were practising teachers or childcare providers, although some partici-

Table A3
Focus Group Participation by
Location, Language and Gender

English			French		Total	
Location	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Edmonton	5	-	-	-	5	-
Ottawa	7	2	4	-	11	2
Québec City	5	1	6	1	11	2
Fredericton	7	1	6	-	13	1
Total			16	1	40	5
			17		45	

pants had taken teaching or early childhood education training, and others had done volunteer work with young children in child care or classroom settings.

All participants had children attending junior kindergarten or kindergarten who were the focus of the discussions. Most had current or recent experience with various types of child care arrangements from informal, home-based arrangements to regulated group care programs, including school-based services. A number of the children, when not in school, either went to a caregiver's house or were cared for at home by a parent or child care provider.

1.6.2. research questions for focus group discussions

The following list identifies the research questions around which focus group discussions were structured to determine:

- whether child care and kindergarten arrangements and options are issues for parents
- whether coordination of kindergarten and child care is a salient issue for parents
- what differences, if any, parents see between kindergarten and child care
- what differences, if any, parents perceive between the skill sets of child care staff and kindergarten teachers
- what values parents hold about early childhood education
- the extent to which the present options are meeting or are not meeting their expectations
- the factors influencing satisfaction and dissatisfaction with current options
- the features and characteristics of an ideal model of education and care. Would parents prefer a full-day kindergarten or something else? What are their reasons?
- parents' reactions to a fully coordinated model of child care and education, and ways to communicate such a model to parents.